

## Unit 6

# Durkheim and Functionalism

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### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- write about Durkheim and Functionalism;
- distinguish between sacred and profane;
- describe totemism; and
- analyze religion and construction of knowledge.

### 6.1 Introduction

Durkheim was a leading French sociologist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His classic work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* was published in 1912. In this work he developed his sociological theory of religion, and more generally, of knowledge. In this work Durkheim tries to explore the origins and causes of religion - form him a permanent and essential aspect of human life. He sought the origins of religion in society, rather than in the individual human mind. He considered that the social existence of men determines their social consciousness. Durkheim's main interest was the ways in which society is bound together. He investigated the role of religion in keeping society together, and sought the origin of religion in communal emotion. He thought the model for relationships between people and the supernatural was the relationship between individuals and the community (Durkheim 2001).

For him religion is a group phenomenon for it is group, which gives a religion its specific character and unity. On the other hand religion unifies the group and binds people together. Thus, he conclusively argues that religious ideas are derived from society and serve to bind the members of a society together. This essential and positive function of the religion, of solidifying a society, makes it a ubiquitous and permanent institution.

Durkheim develops this theory on religion by studying the aboriginal tribes of Australia.

The present unit elaborates on how he develops his sociological theory of religion. Before discussing on that let us see briefly the theoretical perspective of functionalism since his analysis of religion is in this approach.

## 6.2 Functionalism as a Sociological Perspective

Functionalism is the oldest and still the dominant theoretical perspective in sociology and other social sciences. In functionalist approach a social phenomena is analysed in terms of its functions towards maintaining the social unity. Functionalism as a theoretical perspective drawn heavily from the biological theories and functioning of human bodies. This perspective is built upon twin emphases: application of the scientific method to the objective social world and use of an analogy between the individual organism and society. The functioning of a human body is analysed in terms of the functioning of the various human organs in relation to each other as well as the organism as a whole. Functionalism adopts a similar perspective.

It is considered that the society is made up of various parts and the various parts of the society are seen to be interrelated and taken together, they form a complete system. Like biologists, the functionalists analyse any part of the society, such as family or religion etc. in terms of its contribution to the maintenance of the whole system. Thus, according to functionalist perspective society is regarded as a system, which is made up of interrelated or interconnected parts and each part has a function to fulfil for the maintenance of the whole system (Turner 1987).

### Box 6.1: Biopsychological or Organic Functionalism and Structural Functionalism

In anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown are viewed as the founders of modern functionalism. However, their functionalisms are dramatically different. While Malinowski's functionalism is based on human biology and psychology, Radcliffe-Brown's is a structural functionalism. The biopsychological approach pays close attention to the individual and de-emphasises the importance of the social system as having a reason of existence beyond that of the individual, i.e. for Malinowski functionalism is a metamorphosis of the seven needs of the individual nutrition, reproduction, bodily comforts, safety, relation, movement, and growth into the secondary needs of society. The needs of the individual are satisfied by the social structure of his culture, whose function is to satisfy those human needs. In other words, every social institution has a need to satisfy, and so does every item in a culture. Malinowski gives us the ultimate in a functional approach. Much as Malinowski was interested in the individual and biopsychological approaches, Radcliffe-Brown was interested in the functioning of the social structure. The functionalist dimension of Radcliffe-Brown's work with its structural underpinnings, constitutes the foundations of structural functionalism in social anthropology as well as in sociological thought. He was more interested in generalisation and theory. His two major methodological positions were: a) that the individual is of no account and that it is only the social system that matters, and b) use of the organic analogy. Radcliffe-Brown derived his concept of function from physiology. He believed that the term "function" in the social sciences meant the same process as in biology. A different way of

putting this is to say that function is the contribution an element makes to the whole social system. The difference between Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski is, then, that Malinowski started with the individual. Individual needs were incidental to Radcliffe-Brown, who regarded the system of human interactions rather than human beings as being central in a functionalist approach to society. "Structure" refers to a system or organised parts. These parts are individual persons who participate in social life, occupying statuses within the system. The social network is made up of social relationships between individuals of a society. The individual is in turn controlled by norms or patterns. His approach is markedly different than Durkheim's or Mauss' view. (<http://www.panam.edu/faculty>)

Functionalism begins with the pretext that the human behaviours in a society are structured. The relationships between the members of the society are organised in terms of rules. Social relationships therefore are patterned and recurrent, which form the basis of the social structure. The structure of the society is viewed as the sum total of the social relationships that are governed by norms. The various institutions of the society such as the family, religion, economy, educational and political systems etc. are the various aspects of the social structure. Thus, the institution can be seen as a structure made up of interconnected roles or interrelated norms.

As said earlier, like, biologists the basic consideration of the functionalists is with regard the functioning of the various parts of the social structure. This involves an examination of the relationship between the different parts of the structure and their relationship to the society as a whole or the function of that part to the maintenance of the whole system. Thus, in practice, function means the contribution an institution makes to the maintenance and survival of the whole system. Like, for instance, the function of the family is socialisation of the new members of the society.

This analogy between society and an organism focuses attention on the homeostatic nature of social systems: social systems work to maintain equilibrium and to return to it after external shocks disturb the balance among social institutions. According to them societies have some basic requirements or needs, known as functional prerequisites, which have to be met for the survival and maintaining the equilibrium of the social system. A primary concern of functionalist is the survival of the social system and they assume that a minimal degree of integration between its parts and certain degree of order and stability is essential for its survival. The major concern of the functionalists thus, is to explain the origin and the maintenance of stability of the social system.

#### a) Durkheimian Functionalism

The stream of functionalism that Durkheim developed is known as structural functionalism. He is one of the founders of structural functionalism. Whereas in functionalism the social structures are studied in terms of its functions for fulfilling the biological or individual needs, in structural functionalism the functions of social structures for maintaining the social unity is concentrated more. For Durkheim society is an entity in itself (*sui generis*), which consists of several constituent parts. Durkheim rejected reductionist arguments. He argued the society has its own identity different from its constituent parts. His focus was on studying the functions of social facts, social structures, cultural norms, and values, all of which he argued are external to the individual (Kenneth 1982).

Durkheim was more concerned about the social solidarity or cohesion and how a social unit holds its members together. Durkheim stressed the importance of studying social phenomena as they function to maintain the solidarity of social structures (Broce 1973). He used concepts such as organic solidarity and collective conscience to address this question. Society must be studied by studying social facts, which are parts of the shared awareness in a society. He tried to explain the apparent stability and internal cohesion of societies, which are necessary to ensure its continued existence over time. Societies are seen as coherent, bounded and fundamentally relational constructs, who function like organisms, with their various parts (social institutions) working together to maintain and reproduce them. The various parts of society are assumed to work in an unconscious, quasi-automatic fashion towards the maintenance of the overall social equilibrium. All social and cultural phenomena are therefore seen as being functional in the sense of working together to achieve this state and are effectively deemed to have a “life” of their own. They are then primarily analysed in terms of this function they play. Individuals are significant not in and of themselves but in terms of their status, their position in patterns of social relations, and their role, the behaviour(s) associated with their status. The social structure is then the network of statuses connected by associated roles (Layton 1997).

### Reflection and Action 6.1

Do you think that Marxian analysis of religion is a functionalist approach? How is this different from Durkheim’s functionalist approach to the study of religion?

Later Durkheim added another explication of social solidarity: that which centers around conscience collective. The meaning of this phrase in English is something like “shared awareness” or “common understanding”. For Durkheim social facts are what anthropologists understand to be culture. An example of this can be seen in the Elementary Forms of the Religious Life where Durkheim claims that the totem the sacred object is a representation by which society symbolises itself. The totem is the society rationalised through religion. Such a belief implies that a totem, like any other symbol, is a collective representation. This value is given to the representation by the society itself. This results in an epistemology that claims that individual knowledge results neither from the “mind” nor from the senses; rather, we know what we know because we learn socially devised “collective representations”.

#### b) Religion: A Functional Perspective

Religion is a social institution. Functionalist analyse religion in terms of its functions or contributions that the religion makes for meeting the functional pre-requisites or basic needs of the society such as social solidarity, value consensus, harmony and integration between different parts of the society etc. According to them religion is functional and ensures the survival of the social system (Haralambos 1981).

Functionalists argue that religion is an integrating force in the society, a means of ensuring that people feel that they belong to the society. It gives the people the feeling of having something in common with others in the society. It is a means for the people to express collective beliefs concerning the social commitment and social solidarity. It provides a way for the people to affirm common values, beliefs and ideals. It is collective consciousness. It also serves as the central value system. Thus, for functionalists any social phenomena/institution that serves these functions can be called as religion (Fenn 2003).

## 6.3 Durkheim and Elementary Forms of Religious Life

Durkheim explores in detail the functional role of religion in society in his seminal work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. His underlying interest was to understand the basic forms of religious life for all societies and also to why it is a permanent social institution. This study deals with one case study in depth, the religion of Arunta tribe of Australian aborigines, which Durkheim calls 'the simplest and most primitive known today'. This was the last major work published (1912) by Durkheim, and is generally regarded as his best and most mature. The book contains a description and a detailed analysis of the clan system and of totemism of Arunta tribes. Based on the study he elaborates a general theory of religion. Besides that he also outlines the sociological interpretation of the forms of human thought, which is at the core of the contemporary sociology of knowledge.

This study aims to study the primitive religion and explain its basic structure, which Durkheim believed will lead to the understanding of religion and religious nature of the society. Such an analysis of the primitive religion according to Durkheim aid in arriving at an understanding of the contemporary religions. In this work Durkheim undertakes an examination of religion from the perspective of positive science rather than from a spirit-world as done by earlier theoreticians (e.g. Animism of Tylor, Naturism of Max Mueller). He believed a scientific investigation of the observable aspects religion would lead to the discovery of most basic elements underlying the religious life, which he calls the elementary forms. The study of these elementary forms will facilitate the discovery of what is fundamental to religious life in all societies.

Basic to his theory of religion is the stress on religious phenomena as communal rather than individual. For him religion is essentially social, a product of the collective life and an embodiment of the moral requisites of human social existence (Bellah 1983). For Durkheim, humans are religious because they are members of collectivities, and neither individuals nor groups can long exist without religion – that is to say, moral – constraint. For him religion was an expression of social cohesion. In *Elementary Forms*, Durkheim makes the argument that the totemic gods the aborigines worship are actually expressions of their own conceptions of society itself. This is true not only for the aborigines, he argues, but for all societies. Religion, for Durkheim, is not imaginary. Religion is very real; it is an expression of society itself, and indeed, there is no society that does not have religion. Religion is an expression of our collective consciousness, which is the fusion of all of our individual consciousnesses, which then creates a reality of its own. Thus, Durkheim provides a functional definition of religion, meaning that it explains what religion does in social life: essentially, it unites societies. Now let us turn to the definition of religion as given by Durkheim.

## 6.4 Durkheim's Positive Definition of Religion

Durkheim placed himself in the positivist tradition, meaning that he thought of his study of society as dispassionate and scientific. Durkheim's search for a definition of religion takes two important directions - the positive direction and the investigative direction. By positive Durkheim meant the ability to describe religion in terms of which are subject to observation, as opposed to the speculative thinking (such as belief in spirits etc.). The investigative direction pursues religion by reducing it to elementary parts, looking for what is common for all religions. To derive at a definition of

religion Durkheim looked for the observable common features found in various religious practices.

He 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 in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (cf. Pickering 1975). The concept of church as Durkheim employs here refers to the existence of a regularised ceremonial organisation pertaining to a particular to a definite group of worshippers (not necessarily a specialised priesthood). This definition of religion has two central parts. First is that all religions can be defined in terms of a system of beliefs and rites. Beliefs refer to a set of ideas and attitudes held in relation to sacred things, whereas rites are defined as a system of action, which is developed toward the religious things or objects. Second is that all religions can be defined in terms of their tendency to divide the world into two regions, the sacred and the profane. For him the division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane is the most distinctive trait of the religious life (Morrison 1998).

### **Box 6.2: Wider Interpretation of Durkheims Definition of Religion**

Durkheim's definition of religion does not stipulate what exactly may be considered sacred. Thus, later sociologists of religion (notably Robert Bellah) have extended Durkheimian insights to talk about notions of civil religion, or the religion of a state. American civil religion, for example, might be said to have its own set of sacred "things": American flags, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, etc. Other sociologists have taken Durkheim in the direction of the religion of professional sports, or of rock music. There are some Indian sociologists who give a religious casting to the game of cricket.

## **6.5 Sacred and Profane**

Durkheim stated that religion is primarily concerned with three kinds of activities: a) maintaining a separation between sacred and profane, b) laying down a system of beliefs for the faithful, and c) setting up a system of rules that forbids certain ways of acting. He argued that religious phenomena emerge in any society when a separation is made between the sphere of the profane - the realm of everyday utilitarian activities - and the sphere of the sacred - the area that is set apart, transcendental, the extraordinary. An object is intrinsically neither sacred nor profane. It becomes the one or the other depending on whether men choose to consider the utilitarian value of the object or certain intrinsic attributes that have nothing to do with its instrumental value. This division between sacred and profane is common to all the religions and according to Durkheim, this division is the most distinctive element of religious life since it forms the basis of religious life in several respects. "In all the history of human thought," Durkheim emphasised, "there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another" (Pickering 1984).

While trying to find out the common observable features of religious life, Durkheim perceived that the belief in supernatural realm is not common to all the religions (like in Buddhism there is no common deity), but separation of different aspects of life, physical things, and certain behaviours into two categories of sacred and profane is common. Objects

and behaviours deemed sacred were considered part of the spiritual or religious realm. They were part of rites, objects of reverence, or simply behaviours deemed special by religious belief. Those things deemed profane were everything else in the world that did not have a religious function or hold religious meaning. In general, those aspects of social life given moral superiority or reverence are considered sacred, and all other aspects are part of the profane. For example, the Catholic Church respects the crucifix and the behaviours and actions performed during 'mass' as sacred, while other behaviours and objects are not.

### **Box 6.3: Sacred as Symbolic**

The wine at catholic 'mass' has sacred ritual significance to the extent that it is considered by the believer to symbolise the blood of Christ; in this context it is plainly not a beverage. Sacred activities are valued by the community of believers not as means to ends, but because the religious community has bestowed their meaning on them as part of its worship.

Thus, sacred may embody transcendental gods and deities or natural things and objects or beliefs, rites and practices or words, expressions or combination of words or anything socially defined as requiring special religious treatment. The sacred things are symbols that they represent something. "The Sacred thing", wrote Durkheim, "is *par excellence* that which the profane should not touch and cannot touch with impunity" (*Ibid*). The special character of the sacred is the manifestation of ritual prescriptions and proscriptions, which separate it radically from profane. The profane, according to Durkheim, is something subordinated in dignity to the sacred and therefore is seen as radically opposite to sacred. All that is not sacred is profane. Although these two categories are rigidly defined and set apart, they interact with one another and depend on each other for survival. Profane is the principle, which has the capacity to contaminate sacred and in that sense sacred is defined and distinguished in relation to profane. This division of things into two separate but interacting spheres is common among all religions.

### **Box 6.4: Six characteristics of Sacred and Profane**

Durkheim outlines six characteristics of Sacred and Profane. These are:

- the sacred is always separated from all other objects and therefore constitute things that set apart.
- a system of rites and social practices arise which sets out how the sacred to be approached and how members of the group are to conduct themselves in the presence of sacred objects.
- sacred things are things protected by interdictions which have the force of prohibitions or taboos acting to protect and isolate sacred.
- sacred things are segregated from profane things and thought to be superior in dignity.
- the sacred and profane represent a unifying principle which separates the natural from the spiritual world and in this way provides society with a model of opposites such as god and evil, clean and dirty, holy and defiled and so on.
- passage from the profane to the sacred must be accompanied by rites which are thought to transform one state into the other through rituals of initiation or rebirth.

## 6.6 Totemism: The Elementary Form of Religion

Instead of animism and naturism, Durkheim took totemism among the Australian tribes as the key concept to explain the origin of religion because he believed that Australian totemism exemplifies the most elementary form of religion and that the underlying system of beliefs best exemplifies the nature of religious life. He makes a sociological investigation to the totemic beliefs and the structure of totemism itself for isolating the factors underlying the origin of totemism and thus to discover the causes leading to the rise of religious sentiment in humanity (Ronald 1987).

Totemism is integrally connected with the clan system of organisation, which is characteristic of the Australian societies. A specific feature of the totemic clan is that the name that denotes the identity of the clan group is that of a material object - a totem - which is believed to have very special properties. The members of each clan consider themselves bound together by a special kind of kinship, based not on blood, but on the mere fact that they share the same totem. It is believed to have a mysterious or sacred force or principle that provides sanctions for violations of taboos and inculcates moral responsibility in the group. Two clans within the same tribe cannot have the same totem. A totem may be an animal, a vegetable, or an inanimate object. It is the axis of dichotomy between sacred and profane. The sacred character of the totem manifests in the ritual observances, which separate it from ordinary objects that may be used to utilitarian ends (Giddens 1992). The totem is the name of the object from which beliefs and rites flow, and in this sense it is also what Durkheim called an "emblem" which represents the group. The totem emblem designates the name of the group and stands for the group as its badge. The totem emblem takes the form of "churinga", which, according to Durkheim, is the physical embodiment of the totem and is typically a piece of wood or a polished stone on which there is a design representing the totem of the particular group. It is believed to have extraordinary sacredness and various ritual prescriptions and prohibitions surround them (Morrison 1998).

The same religious sentiments aroused by these designs, of course, are aroused by the members of the totemic species themselves. Clan members are thus forbidden to kill or eat the totemic animal or plant except at certain mystical feasts and the violation of this interdiction is assumed to produce death instantaneously. Moreover, the clan members themselves are "sacred" in so far as they belong to the totemic species, a belief which gives rise to genealogical myths explaining how men could have had animal and even vegetable ancestors. Totemism is thus a religion in which three classes of things - the totemic emblem, the totem (animal or plant or some other object), and the members of the clan are recognised as sacred.

### a) Clan, Totem and Cosmology

For Durkheim religions are cosmologies in that they are the primitive ways of ordering and classifying the world (Thompson 1993). He viewed all religions as systems of ideas that tend to embrace the universality of things and to give us a complete representation of the world. He concluded this from his observations of the religious practices among the Australian tribes. Among them the totem is classified and divided into sacred and profane and the divisions are projected into the nature. All things arranged in the same clan are regarded as extensions of the totemic animal, as "of the same flesh". From this arises the tendency to divide the natural world into classes, groups and categories and thus, to classify the nature itself.

In this view all the things in the natural world, including the sun, moon, stars, earth, planets etc. are understood to belong to different classes and groups. Thus, totemism constitutes a cosmology, in which all known things are distributed among the various clans and phratries, so that everything is classified according to the social organisation of the tribe. All objects classed in a given clan or phratery are regarded as sharing qualities in common and such objects are believed by the members of the clan to be affiliated to the same flesh as themselves.

Durkheim believed that they could organise the nature because they themselves are organised socially; and they are able to organise things according to their societal model (Morison 1998). Thus, for Durkheim the principle of religious organisation is the model of group organisation, which in turn is the first model for classifying things in this world. Since all of these beliefs clearly imply a division of things between sacred and profane, they were called "religious"; and since they appear not only related, but inseparably connected, to the simplest form of social organisation known, Durkheim insisted that they are surely the most elementary forms of the religious life. Durkheim also deduced that all understanding of the natural and social world derives from a religious system of ideas, since there exists a strong connection between the religious beliefs and organisation of individuals into groups.

### Reflection and Action 6.1

What do you understand by tribal cosmology?

#### b) Totem and Society

The totemic emblem, the totem and the members of the clan all are considered sacred in totemism. So also everything in a clan and under totem is classified and everything including all objects have certain quality of religiosity and sacredness though in varying degrees. Then if everything is sacred, Durkheim tries to find out the origin of this sacredness. Durkheim observes it cannot be from either of others since all of them share a common religiosity. Their sacred character must therefore emanate from a source, which embraces them all, a force which they all partially share in, but which is nonetheless separate from them. The religious energy found in a diffuse (not differentiated as in Manaim among North American Indians) and all-pervasive form in Australian totemism, according to Durkheim, is the original source of all later more particularised incarnations of this general force which become manifest as gods, spirits and demons in more complex religions (Giddens 1992).

In order to find the source of the general energy, which underpins of all that is sacred, Durkheim found, it is not from the immediate sensations produced by the totems as physical objects because most of the times the totemic objects are often insignificant animals or plants, which could not intrinsically evoke the powerful feelings of religiosity that are attributed to them. Moreover, the representation of totem (emblem) is considered more sacred than the totemic object itself. Durkheim finds that the totem symbolises both the sacred energy and the identity of the clan group. Thus, Durkheim reaches the inference that totem at the same time represents both the God and the society, and hence both God and society are the same. He argued by worshipping God people actually worshipped society itself (Lukes 1973).

Society commands both obligation and respect, the twin characteristics of sacred. Whether it exists as a diffuse impersonal force or whether it is

pesonalised, the sacred object is conceived as a superior entity, which in fact symbolises the superiority of the society over the individual. This is how Durkheim draws his theory of religion.

### Reflection and Action 6.2

How did Durkheim reach the conclusion that by worshipping God people are in fact worshipping the society itself?

## 6.7 Categories of Religious Rites and their Social Functions

The beliefs and rites are found in all religions and it is one of the fundamental aspects of religion. Beliefs are the ideas and attitudes, which are held in regard to religious objects. Rites are the categories of actions taken towards sacred objects and they involve the important capacity of laying down the interdictions, which means limitations or restrictions on what is permissible with regard to the sacred. There are two broad important systems of interdicts or ritual practices; those, which proscribe things or objects which are incompatible and those which requires separation between the sacred and profane (Pickering 1975).

Durkheim identified four distinct categories of religious rites.

- i) Sacrificial rites, which are related to initiation and sacrifice. These are the class of rites, which specify and regulate the obligations individuals have toward objects of the group, which either serve the clan as a totem or are designated as fundamental to life. These include the objects related to survival such as essential foods and the powers related to regeneration. These rites involve ceremonies in which the productive powers of the natural world are celebrated. The system of rites related to sacrifice performs two important roles. They sanctify the individuals who take part in them and they re-enact and revivify the collective practices and social sentiments of the group.
- ii) Imitative rites, permitting the imitation of the totem animal for purposes of reproduction. These rituals imitate the various movements and habits of animals whose reproductive powers are desired. The actions of these rites entail ceremonies in which individuals decorate themselves in a ritual manner by imitating the figurative forms and actions of animals or insects. In the rites of imitation the members of the tribe assume that the condition and the qualities of the objects being imitated are transferred to the members of the group and along with this something new is created. By imitating the animal's being they create the belief that the animal will be reproduced.
- iii) Commemorative rites are rites, which relate to how the group represents itself to the group. These rites consist solely in recollecting the past and making it present by means of representation. The function of these rites is to represent the group by putting into practice the mythical history of the ancestors from the moment they emerge and they commemorate their actions and works faithfully in a ceremony. The rites serve to sustain the vitality of the beliefs and to keep them from being forgotten. This is way to renew the sentiments which society has of itself and its unity and strengthening the social nature of the group.
- iv) Piacular rites, which are rites performed to represent loss or suffering. This class of rites is reserved for assigning the ritual and religious

importance to everything that involves misfortune, loss and death. Whereas the other systems rites all celebrate positive events in group life, piacular rites affirm the religious significance and seriousness of misfortune and distress. Occasions of ceremonies where the dead are mourned or where a bad harvest threatens the survival of the group involve piacular rituals. These rites functions to renew the group to its prior state of unity preceding the misfortune and may involve all sorts of collective activity such as weeping, lamenting, kissing and wailing.

## 6.8 Religion and Construction of Knowledge

While trying to explain the causal origin of religion Durkheim relates religion to the origins of conceptual and explanatory thought. According to him the general tendency of religious beliefs is to classify the natural and the social world into distinct categories and this is ultimately social as it has origins in group life. He argued that since explaining universe is religious in origin, the intellectual categories must be products of social activity (Morrison 1998). Thus, his sociology of knowledge postulates that the categories of man's thought, his ways of conceiving space and time, for example, can be traced to his mode of social life.

Durkheim maintained that spatial, temporal, and other thought classifications of human beings are social in origin, closely approximating the social organisation of primitive people. Durkheim attempted a sociological explanation of all fundamental categories of human thought, especially the central concepts of time and space. These, he claimed, are not only transmitted by society, but they are social creations. Society is decisive in the genesis of logical thought by forming the concepts of which that thought is made. The social organisation of the primitive community is the model for the primitive's spatial organisation of his surrounding world. Similarly, temporal divisions into days, weeks, months, and years correspond to periodical recurrences of rites, feasts, and ceremonies. A calendar expresses the rhythm of the collective activities, while at the same time its function is to assure their regularities. (Coser 1977:139-140).

## 6.9 Critical Remarks on Durkheim's Sociology of Religion

The themes and hypothesis forwarded by Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* have stimulated the interest and excitement of several generations of sociologists irrespective of theoretical "school" or field of specialisation. Nonetheless, it is not without criticisms (Lukes 1973, Fenton Steve 1984). Let us try to point out some here.

- Durkheim largely ignores the role of individual religious leaders, as well as the way religion functions in social conflict and asymmetrical relations of power.
- The "collective consciousness" stimulated by religious assemblies infer more of a social psychology, which is never made explicit.
- Durkheim's theory of religion is based on the case study of a single tribe in Australia. He either ignored the counter-instances among the neighboring Australian tribes, or interpreted them arbitrarily according to some ad hoc, evolutionary speculations.

- Some argue that there is no evidence that Australian totemism is the earliest totemism, let alone the earliest religion; and, though technically less advanced than the North American Indians, the Australians have a kinship system which is far more complex.
- Even if it is limited to Australian tribes, it is found that the major cohesive force among aborigines is the tribe rather than the clan; that there are clans without totems (and totems without clans); that most totems are not represented by the carvings and inscriptions on which Durkheim placed so much weight; and that the "high gods" of Australia are not born of a synthesis of totems.
- Criticisms such as these have led some scholars to suggest that the Australian data were introduced simply to illustrate Durkheim's theories, rather than the theories being constructed or adopted to account for the data.
- Criticisms similar to his sociology of religion is also placed against his argument that the most basic categories of human thought have their origin in social experience.

## 6.10 Conclusion

Durkheim studied the aboriginal tribes of Australia in an effort to understand religion and how it functions to hold society. He established that by worshipping the supreme God people are actually worshipping the society. For him the function of religion was to make people willing to put the interests of society ahead of their own desires. He proves his arguments with reasons. All members of the tribe gather together to perform periodic totem rituals; it is these rituals that set the rules for social order. It is forbidden to kill or harm the totem animal and it is therefore forbidden to kill or harm one's fellow tribesmen who name themselves after the totem. Durkheim argues this is true for is true with modern religion too. In the modern Christian religion, he views the moral commandments such as The Golden Rule and The Ten Commandments are primarily social rules. These rules regulate human's behaviour toward each other and serve to maintain a sense of social unity. People do not follow these rules out of their fear for heaven or hell but for their desire to be accepted by society. If they participate in the religious rituals they will feel a sense of belonging, whereas those who break the rules and avoid the rituals suffer from social isolation. To Durkheim, God is merely a symbol of society. This is Durkheim's sociology of religion.

## 6.11 Further Reading

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## Unit 7

# Weber and the Question of Meaning

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### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- describe method and meaning according to Weber;
- outline Webers Sociology of Religion;
- analyse the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism; and
- describe the religions specialists.

### 7.1 Introduction

One of the major concerns of Max Weber (1864 -1920) was to explore various ways in which the economic aspects of social life can be studied. Towards that end he tried to distinguish social institutions into strictly economic, economically relevant or economically conditioned. Institutions that are predominantly economic are those, as Weber stated, which are deliberately created for economic ends, for example, bank, factory, stock exchange. But there are institutions which are in themselves non-economic but which may be nonetheless economically relevant. For Weber religions do not have any immediately obvious economic character; yet upon closer examination reveal certain consequences for economic conduct and development. Weber through his researches attempted to demonstrate the economic relevance of various religious ethics. He argues non-economic orders have a significant causal influence upon the economic orders of the society. How he interprets the causal relationship between the religion and the economic order is the focus of present unit. Before going in details of that let us have a brief look at Weber's methodology, which is important to understand how he explains the subjective meaning that people give to their religious actions.

## 7.2 Max Weber on Sociology and Social Action

Max Weber conceived sociology as a comprehensive science of social action. For him Sociology is a science, which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action. He tries to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects and seeks to formulate type concepts and generalised uniformities of empirical processes. Weber's primary focus was on the subjective meanings that human actors attach to their actions in their mutual orientations within specific social-historical contexts. Behaviour devoid of such meaning, Weber argued, falls outside the purview of sociology.

Though sociology is a scientific study of social actions of human beings, Weber makes a distinction between natural sciences and social sciences and argues that the methodological procedures employed in all sciences are not identical. For him sociologists study humankind - their behaviour and their explanations of behaviour - therefore necessarily bringing to their subject matter a special kind of understanding or participatory cognitive reflection. Since individuals in a social situation undergo certain experiences, the sociologists cannot avoid including in his purview the physiological causes and effects of these experiences. For Weber, the ability to grasp the subjective quality of human behaviour is dependent upon the scientist's ability to interpret the causal meaning of the human action. According to him a correct causal interpretation of a concrete course of action is arrived at when the overt action and the motives have both been correctly apprehended and at the same time their relation has become meaningfully comprehensible (Heydebrand 1994).

Action is social when, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual(s), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby guided. Not all actions are social. If the action is not oriented to the behaviour of others, it is not social. Also, it is not merely action participated in by a crowd or action influenced by or imitative of others. Action can be causally determined by the behaviour of others, while still not necessarily being meaningfully determined by the action of others.

### Box 7.1: Weber's Typology of Social Action

Depending on the mode of orientation of the actors four major types of social action are distinguished in Weber's sociology. Men may engage in purposeful or goal-oriented rational action (*zweckrational*); their rational action may be value-oriented (*wertrational*); they may act from emotional or affective motivations; or, finally, they may engage in traditional action. In rational-action both goal and means are rationally chosen. Value-oriented rational action is characterised by striving for a substantive goal, which in itself may not be rational but which is nonetheless pursued with rational means. Affective action is anchored in the emotional state of the actor rather than in the rational weighing of means and ends, as in the case of participants in the religious services of a fundamentalist sect. Finally, traditional action is guided by customary habits of thought, by reliance on "the eternal yesterday"; the behaviour of members of an Orthodox Jewish congregation might serve as an example of such action.

Weber was primarily concerned with modern Western society, in which, as he saw it, behaviour had come to be dominated increasingly by goal-

oriented rationality, whereas in earlier periods it tended to be motivated by tradition, affect, or value-oriented rationality.

### 7.3 The Methodological Foundations of Sociology and the Question of Meaning

Weber's methodology depends upon his conviction that the social scientists can understand the meaningful social relationships. He used the term sympathetic introspection to designate the core of this approach. He argued that for the verifiable accuracy of interpretation of the meaning of the phenomena, it is of great help to put one's own self in the place of the actor and to sympathetically to participate in his experience. If the sociologist is to interpretively grasp the meaning of human behaviour, he must come to grip with the causal motivation behind the action itself. Using the same methodology as well as the analytical tool of ideal type Weber tries to orient religious actions towards the development of modern capitalism.

Like sympathetic introspection, another analytical tool he used for the sociological examination of social action is the typological analysis, where ideal types are constructed for the scientist to contrast with the actual type. There are two kinds of meaning for social action: a) actually existing meaning in a given concrete case of a particular actor, or average or approximate meaning attributed to a given number of actors; and b) theoretically conceived pure types of subjective meaning attributed to hypothetical actor(s) in a given type of action (like an ideal type).

The basis for understanding meaning may be either rational (logical or mathematical - clear intellectual grasp of things) or emotionally empathetic or artistically appreciative (though sympathetic participation we grasp the emotional context in which the action took place). There are two kinds of understanding: a) direct observational understanding of subjective meaning of a given act (e.g., if I start to shout at you, you could directly observe my irrational emotional reaction by virtue of my shouting). b) explanatory understanding: we understand motive, or, what makes an individual do a particular thing in a particular circumstance. Since we are interested in the subjective meaning of action, we must place an action in the complex of meaning in which it takes place.

In most cases, actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-conscious or actually unconscious of its subjective meaning. The ideal type case of meaning is where meaning is fully conscious and explicit: this rarely happens in reality.

### 7.4 Weber's Sociology of Religion

Max Weber's sociology of religion deals with the typological and objective understanding of the subjective meaning of the religious action or inaction by the social actors. In order to make such knowledge of the understanding objective, he founded the methodology of the ideal type and the elective affinity of causal relationships. Weber elaborated a set of categories, such as types of prophecy, the idea of charisma (spiritual power), routinisation, and other categories, which became tools to deal with the comparative material. (Ninian Smart. "The Study and Classification of Religions," in Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th ed). Weber holds that there is no universal law of society as supposed in natural science, or the law of history which determines the course of the dynamic mechanically. For Weber the (social) scientist's goal is to arrive at propositions of fact or at

relations of causality or at comprehensive interpretations that are universally valid (Aron, 1967). The goal of Weber's sociology of religion is to understand religious action from the subjective meaning of the actor rationally and also categorically; it is not to establish the laws of religion and society, or to extract the essence of religious action. He was not interested in formulating and evaluating the social function of religion (as done by Marx and Durkheim).

### Reflection and Action 7.1

How is Weber's analysis of religion different from that of Marx and Durkheim?

Typological and comparative understanding of religious action depends on the theoretical construction of the ideal type through thinking or empathic experiments. Objective understanding of religious action, on the other hand, depends on the value-judgement free analysis of the subjective meaning of social action from the viewpoint of ideas as well as material and mental interests. To make a value-judgement free analysis, one has to distinguish the empirical recognition of "what is" from the normative judgement of "what should be". The validity of an ethical claim is not the matter of social analysis, but the matter of conscience and belief. The criteria of value-judgement is imperative, and does not depend on empirical reality. The understanding of "what is", on the other hand, involves not just empirical facts of social action, but also the subjective meaning of the social action. Social action is not mechanical reaction of the law of material interests, but the dynamic of ideas and interests, which give the actor the conscious or unconscious meaning of life and the world. In order to understand sociological reality of religion, Weber holds the importance of religious idea, which cannot be reduced to the component of material interests (Marx) or to the social nexus and function (Durkheim). According to Weber "Not ideas, but material and ideal (ideological) interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the world images that have been created by ideas, like a switchman, have determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest" (Moriyuki Abukuma <http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/>).

## 7.5 Weber's Central Thesis on Religion and Economy

Weber in his analysis on religion was concerned about the social change caused by religion rather than the functions of religion. As said earlier, he studies religion in terms of the subjective meaning of religious action or inaction of social actors. Based on that Weber propounds a new theory, different from what existed at his time about the rise of capitalism in the modern Western Society, relating the economic and religious spheres of society.

In his most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber examines the relationship between the rise of certain forms of Protestantism and the development of Western industrial capitalism. He wrote this essay between 1902 and 1903, and it was subsequently published as two essays in 1904 and 1905. Max Weber's central thesis of religion and economy is reflected in this masterpiece work. It represents Weber's theme of religion and religious ideas as well as his ideas on capitalism and the capitalist development.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber examines whether the religious beliefs of the individuals affect their actions and tries to show how the beliefs influence individual actions by establishing a connection between patterns of belief and system of social action. He also shows here that there is a connection between religion and the commercial activities. He reaches these inferences based on certain observations of the modern western European society of his time (Zeitlin).

The commercial activities of many of the western European countries intensified along with a simultaneous popularity of Protestantism in these societies. The capitalism of those times were identified by two contradictory activities of amassing wealth beyond the personal uses of individuals and avoidance of use of these wealth for the purposes of personal pleasures and enjoyment. Thus, Weber noticed capitalism is not only the production and exchange, money making and profit, but an ascetic attitude towards life. These two contradictory characteristics led Weber to argue that if asceticism had found its way into commercial activity then a religious ethic must underlie capitalism. Asceticism, for him, is a conscious denial of worldly pleasure with the aim of reaching a valued goal and higher moral state. He used the word asceticism to pinpoint a way of living in the world in which the individual engages in self-denial for purposes of obtaining future rewards.

### Reflection and Action 7.2

What are the features of the 'spirit' of capitalism that Weber talks about?

Weber defined capitalism as modern phenomena; a very complex system of institutions, highly rational in character and the product of a number of developments peculiar to the western civilisation. The capitalism, he is talking about is the rational capitalism. The factors that produced this rational capitalism, according to Weber, are many other rational activities. The rational permanent enterprise, rational accounting, rational technology, and rational law. Not only these, but also a rational spirit, rationalisation of conduct of life in general, and a rationalistic economic ethic. Let us see what is this rational spirit.

## 7.6 The Origins of Spirit of Capitalism

For establishing the role of religious ethic in the development of western capitalism, Weber first tries to make some concrete ideas about some related phenomena. Weber tries to identify the 'spirit' of capitalism. He felt behind the development of western capitalism there underlies a philosophy or 'spirit', which is different from other systems of money making. He identified three overriding imperatives behind the spirit of capitalism; the devotion of amassing wealth and profit beyond the personal needs of the individual; the commitment to unrelieved toil and work coupled with self-denial; and the avoidance of the use of wealth for purposes of personal enjoyment. It is this spirit, according to Weber, forms the special nature of western capitalism.

In order to prove the manifestation of spirit in the economic activity, Weber turns to the works of Benjamin Franklin, a successful entrepreneur who provides some useful tips on how to make money. Weber finds Franklin's advices as a peculiar ethic and they refer to specific 'ethos' or 'spirit', which are ethical maxims for shaping the conduct of life.

### **Box 7.2: Benjamin Franklin's Necessary Hints to those that would be Rich**

Weber quoted Franklin early in his work and based many of this ideas on Franklin's writings:

- For six pounds a year you may have the use of one hundred pounds, provided you are a man of known prudence and honesty.
- He that spend a groat a day, spends idly above six pounds a year, which is the price for the use of one hundred pounds.
- He that wastes idly a groat's worth of his time per day, one day with another, wastes the privilege of using one hundred pounds each day.
- He that idly uses five shillings worth of time, loses five shillings, and might as prudently throw five shillings into the sea.
- He that loses five shillings, not only losses that sum, but all the advantages that might be made by turning it in dealing, which by the time that a young man becomes old, will amount of a considerable amount of money.

Weber then said, "Truly what is here preached is not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a particular ethic... It is not mere business astuteness, that sort of thing is common enough, it is an ethos." He continues, "the earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling; and this virtue and proficiency are, as it is now not difficult to see, the real Alpha and Omega of Franklin's ethic."

Weber maintained that the central spirit of capitalism had the effect of putting forward the expectation of the performance of the work as a moral duty and in doing so it made the non-performance of work as infraction of such duty.

#### a) Modern vs. Traditional Capitalism

Weber maintained that the spirit of capitalism was distinctive of modern western capitalism only; it was not found in the traditional capitalism. The characteristic feature of the western modern capitalism is the unique combination of devotion to the earning of wealth through legitimate economic activity, together with the avoidance of use of this income for the use of personal enjoyment. This is rooted in a belief in the value of efficient performance is a chosen vocation as a duty and virtue. Thus, the presence of ethical demands in the economic activity implies religious doctrine.

Weber shows the distinctiveness of the spirit of modern capitalism by contrasting with the attitudes of the labourers in the traditional capitalism. In the modern capitalism, according to Weber, the employer price the jobs according to different rates and they do it in order to get as much more from the workers as possible. The workers earn more by increasing the intensity of their work, benefiting both employers and the workers by maximising the profit and the wages. Whereas in traditional capitalism raising the piece rates had the effect of less rather than more incentive to work. In traditional capitalism the workers preferred to work less than earning more. They were ready to work to earn as much as they were earning before, which was necessary to meet their traditional needs (Morrison 1998).

### Reflection and Action 7.3

Why according to Weber the 'spirit' of capitalism is not present in the traditional capitalism?

## 7.7 Ascetic Protestantism and Capitalism

The spirit of capitalism cannot simply be inferred from the growth of rationalism as whole in the western society. In *the Protestant Ethic* Weber was trying to unearth the religious beliefs that promoted the spirit of capitalism among the believers. After establishing the existence of correlation between the religious spirit and capitalist spirit in the modern western capitalist society, he attempt was to unearth particular religious ethos that promoted spirit of capitalism. He found an intellectual or spiritual affinity between the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (Lowith, Karl 1993). He examined other religious groups also in an attempt to establish the correlation between the spirits of capitalism and religion.

Although capitalism was found in other societies too, the particular type of capitalism Weber talks about, the combination of unlimited quest for profit and rational discipline of work, developed in the modern western industrial societies only. He tries to find out whether or to what degree a particular attitude towards work determined by a religious conception has been the differential factor present in the Western societies or absent elsewhere, which accounts for the unique course of Western history (Aron 1967). He found that it is consistent with the spirit of certain kind of ascetic Protestantism to adopt an attitude towards economic activity, which is in turn consistent with the spirit of capitalism. There is a spiritual affinity between a certain vision of the world and a certain style of economic activity (*ibid*).

Weber differentiates four main types of ascetic Protestantism: Calvinism, Methodism, Pietism, and the Baptist sects. Weber was not concerned about the overall historical description of the dogma of ascetic Protestantism, but only those elements in their doctrines, which are most consequential affecting the practical conduct of the individual in their economic activity. For that purpose Weber found the doctrines of Calvinism as most closely related to the spirit of capitalism.

### Box 7.3: John Calvin and his Doctrines

John Calvin was a Protestant Reformer whose work came into prominence in sixteenth century. He studied religion and theology in early half of the sixteenth century and there developed an interest in ecclesiastical career. In 1534, Calvin took a critical stance in Catholic theology for its failure to stress the rejection of the worldly pleasures and its permissive doctrine of salvation. Rooted in the catholic thought was the idea that the path of salvation was clearly marked in the cycle of atonement, confession and forgiveness. Calvin thought that catholic teaching was too tolerant and he put forward a salvation theology that was too much restrictive. Shortly thereafter Calvin joined the Protestant reform movement in France and began to device Protestant theology. After careful study of Bible he believed that he discovered a series of restrictive regulations related to worldly activity and, as a result, began to stress a strict interpretation of the Bible. After settling in Geneva, Calvin taught and wrote on theological matters until his

work began to have an impact in western Europe, especially in the development of Protestant ethic. Eventually, Calvin's ideas began to spread more widely throughout Europe, and influenced Protestant religious teachings by laying stress on the restrictive rules regarding personal freedoms and the Protestant attitude towards the world.

Weber identified as the center of the Calvinist's religious reform a body of ideas known as the doctrine of predestination, which was based on some essential decrees. They were:

- Before the world began the God divided all the humanity into two classes of persons; the saved and the damned. To those who had been elected to be saved, God gave everlasting life, salvation and eternal grace. God withheld salvation and gave everlasting death and dishonour to those who are condemned.
- No believer should or could not know their fate until it is revealed to them upon their death. Since the elect differ in no way from the damned, no physical signs or marks distinguished the elect form the damned.
- Nothing could be done to relieve, forgive or reverse the decrees; no priest, no prayer, no sacrament and no worldly forgiveness by confession or communion.
- God has abandoned all but the elect since Christ had endured suffering only for the elect.

Along with these decrees Calvin imposed two obligations of the believers; that they shall assume that they are among the elected and having any doubt about their salvation is a loss of faith in God. He also added that since one's fate is already decided there is no hope of appeal or change of fate through prayer and also since the God is transcendent and could not be called upon or approached.

Weber viewed the consequence of these doctrines for the believer as unprecedented inner loneliness forcing them to follow their path alone to meet the destiny, which had been decreed for them from the eternity. The eradication of the possibility of salvation through church or sacraments according to Weber is the most distinct difference which separated Calvinism from both Lutheranism and Catholicism. Weber argued that a feeling of abandonment and the withdrawal of religious support created a new form of self-reflection in Protestants. Weber reasoned that Protestants have only one avenue of action to combat anxiety and loneliness, to throw themselves into worldly work. Calvinists seek signs of election in this world and because of that they ended up finding in worldly success, even economic success, a sign of election. The individual is impelled towards work in order to overcome the anxiety inevitably resulting from his uncertainty about his eternal destiny. Work-rational, regular and constant - comes to be interpreted as obedience to a commandment of God (Aron 1967). Furthermore there were some coincidence between certain requirements of Calvinist and capitalist logic. Protestant ethic proclaims that it is essential to have this worldly asceticism. Since Calvinists belief that the attainment of wealth became a sign that one had been successful in worldly activity, coupled with their attitude of self-denial increased the likelihood of amassing wealth. It insists on rational work for making profit and restraints spending or consuming that profit for worldly pleasures, but demands reinvesting it. Here the spiritual affinity of Protestantism and capitalism comes in consonance.

**a) Other Worldly and Inner Worldly Asceticism**

Although self-denial and asceticism was found in other religious ethos too, what the Protestants followed was unique. It introduced a thorough going regulation of everyday life, especially in worldly work; this commercial asceticism is what makes it distinct for the monastic and other asceticism. The monastic asceticism also requires its believers to isolate themselves from this world at large and reject the world as form of temptation. Weber identifies two historical types of asceticism, the Other worldly and Inner worldly Asceticism. Both the types of asceticism rejects the world, but for different reasons. Salvation is sought after in otherworldly asceticism by the path to the otherworldly through religious devotion and self-denial. It renounces the world because it presents temptation and it requires the formal withdrawal from the world. In contrary inner worldly asceticism requires its believers to focus their activities in the world on the understanding that the world is individual's responsibility and that they have the obligation to transform it in accordance with an ascetic ideal.

**Reflection and Action 7.4**

How did Weber demonstrate that the inner worldly asceticism encourages the 'spirit' of capitalism?

**b) Relating the Concept of 'Calling' to Capitalism**

The concept of calling can be traced back to Catholic doctrine of Middle ages and essentially refers to being called to a 'life task' of serving God in a vocation by serving ethical acts of devotion (Morrison). Weber pointed out the concept of calling appropriates a different meaning within the Protestant theology (different from Catholicism and other Catholic sects). Protestants interpreted the 'calling' to signify service to worldly rather than the otherworldly services. Although in the earlier days the activities in this world viewed degrading and secular, because it was considered necessary for the everyday life the church tended to view it as morally neutral.

**Box 7.4: Concept of Calling in Catholicism**

The concept of 'calling' had taken a major role in reformation theology due to the influence of Luther. In Catholic theology the concept of 'calling' denoted to the services to God in the form of religious duties, which were above those of everyday secular world. Later the term took on the exclusive meaning of renouncing the temporal world for the monastic life. This was based on the idea that the temporal world of experience was valueless in relation spiritual world.

Protestantism gave the concept of 'calling' a thorough going worldly character. Combined with the worldly activity, Protestant asceticism provided an intense moral focus to transforming the world thorough labour and self-discipline. Also it perpetuated a connection between worldly activity, asceticism and a religious justification to action. By doing this, Weber feels, Protestantism made it clear that the 'calling' is to make worldly economic pursuits. Protestantism thus unites the world of spirit with the world of everyday commercial life, which according to Weber is a feature that is absent in other religions and unique to Protestantism only. The fulfilment of one's worldly duty became the only way for the Protestants could understand their actions are acceptable to God. The 'calling' of the

individual was to fulfil his or her duty to God through the moral conduct of toil. In this scheme toil became equivalent virtue and thus bringing a link between asceticism in economic activity as a worldly profession.

## 7.8 The World Religions

What Weber tried to prove by establishing an affinity between the spirit of capitalism and protestant ethic is that the way the people conceive the world orients action in the world. After establishing the role of Protestant ethic in the development of the Western Capitalism Weber made an attempt to unearth whether a worldly asceticism of which protestant ethic is a typical example exist outside the Western Civilisation. Weber found the modern capitalism with its unique features that developed in the western Europe did not develop in any other part of the world except there. Also he felt, all circumstances being the same between the West and the non-West, the only factor that was lacking in the non-West is a particular religious ethic. He gives the example of Chinese society, where according to Weber, many conditions necessary for the development of capitalism existed, and the one of the variable absent was the religious variable. Weber makes a comparative study of the world religions in order to find out what is absent in many of these world religions (that is present in protestant religious ethics), which could not help in the development of modern capitalism that was developed in the modern western societies.

### a) The Religion of China: Confucianism

As said earlier in studying the world religions the main concern of Weber was why rational capitalism emerged as an indigenous development only in the West. He studies and compares the religion in China to that of Protestantism as well as other social circumstances in China and the West to conclusively say that the aesthetic spirit found in Protestantism is the root cause for the emergence of rational capitalism. In traditional China there were at certain periods a number of important developments had happened, which Weber distinguishes as conducive for capitalism and a rationalised economy. These include the emergence of cities and of guilds, the formation of monetary systems, the development of law, and the achievement of political integration within the patrimonial state. But there were some significant differences, both in terms of secular and religious, between the nature of some of these developments in China and those, which played a role in the rise of European capitalism. Let us see here what the religious values that prevented the emergence of rational capitalism.

Weber found the religious and other conditions in China greatly limited the rationalisation of the economy. He observed that although private property emerged in China, it was never become truly private as in the West. The community or the 'sib' is powerful in China that true alienation of land from it was impossible. The power of the sib rested to a large degree on the ancestor cult; ancestral spirits acted as mediators between their decedents and God. The sib and the other traditional elements were in the long run stronger than the rational bureaucracy. Illiterate old age carried a higher status and authority than the most learned bureaucrat and Chinese justice far from being formal, legal and rational remained patriarchal justice. These all kept the kinship relationships tightly knitted and prevented the rational development of individual.

There were also other religious factors that inhibited the development of rational capitalism in Chinese society. In Confucianism - the Chinese religion, the social order is regarded as a particular case of the cosmic order in

general, which is considered as eternal and inevitable. What is most valued in Confucianism is the cultivated man, who behaves with universal dignity and prosperity, and who is in unison with himself and the outside world. Self-control, the regulation of emotion is demanded by this ethic since harmony of the soul is the ultimate good; passion must not be allowed to disturb this balance. The notion of sin and the corresponding concept of salvation were absent. While Confucianism emphasised on self-control, there was no specific emphasis on asceticism.

Orthodox Confucianism had renounced the beyond and facilitated the beliefs in magic and animism. For Chinese masses a successfully examined candidate and official (a bureaucrat) was by no means a mere applicant for the office qualified by knowledge. He was believed to be the holder of magical qualities just as in an ordained priest of an ecclesiastic institution of grace or to a magician tried and proved by the guild. It is not only were magic and animism tolerated, they were systematised and rationalised so that they became tremendous power in Chinese life. All the sciences, which had empirical and naturalistic beginnings, were completely rationalised as magical and supernatural practices and rituals. As Weber puts it, Chinese world, despite its secular, rational-empirical elements, remained enchanted. The secular bureaucracy too tolerated magic as a means of taming the masses and also they themselves believed in it. And that is the reason why they never strove to divest Chinese culture of magical beliefs and practices.

Weber compares Confucianism and ascetic Protestantism primarily on two interrelated criteria in terms of which the degree of rationalisation of a religion may be determined: how far magic has been eliminated and how far there has developed an internally consistent and universally applicable theodicy. In terms of elimination of magic ascetic Protestantism was more rational. In terms of the later both the belief systems attained rationality though in different ways. Whereas the puritan ethic introduced a deep tension between the religious ideals and the earthly world, Confucianism centered upon the harmonious adaptation of the individual to an inevitably given order. Thus, Weber argues in spite of the various factors which might have acted to promote the rise of rational capitalism; it did not rise spontaneously in China because of the absence of ethical code that was present in Puritanism. Or to put in other wise the religious norms prevailed in China precluded the spontaneous development of capitalism there.

### b) The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism

Hinduism differed from other world religions in some important respects. It is an eclectic and tolerant religion. Hinduism is marked by caste system of vertical segregation of occupational categories. There exist in Hinduism some dogmas or beliefs that shared by most of the believers. The dogmas are certain beliefs the denial of which is considered to be heretical. The most important of these are those of transmigration of souls and the compensation (*karma*). Both these dogmas are directly bound up with the social ordering of caste system existed in Indian society. Karma is the belief that actions of this world/ this life have a consequence for the next life. Karma is a cycle of rebirth, which guarantees status mobility for the individual in the next birth on the basis of his performance of his duty in this birth. The social impact of the karma philosophy is that it prevents the individual from searching for better occupations; it confines him to what is assigned to him through his caste system.

Weber argues that Hinduism lacked an ethic conducive for the development of capitalism, though there existed in the Indian society the social and

cultural conditions, which should have given rise to modern rational capitalism. The caste system in the Hindu society tried to ritually stabilize the occupational structure and hampered the rationalisation of the economy. The Brahmins the highest of the caste group held the highest status and the status of other caste groups, which are actually hereditary occupational groups, depend on their proximity of distance from the Brahmins. The practical ethic of Hinduism was influenced by the Brahmins who kept the larger mass of the society servile to them with the help of magical (purity and pollution) and mystical elements.

These Hindu orthodox beliefs, according to Weber, acted as barriers to challenges to the existing social order. Although trade and manufactured flourished in India at a time when Hinduism firmly established here, the caste system and the ascendancy of Brahmin priesthood and strong beliefs in religious dogmas such as karma philosophy effectively prevented any further economic development in the direction that taken in Europe.

Based on the studies of Asiatic religions (that of India, China, Ceylon, Korea etc.). Weber concludes that although there existed economic strata and forms seemingly conducive to the emergence of a modern rational economy, the East remained in general and enchanted garden dominated by magical mentality. This acted as a brake on the economic developments in particular and on rationalisation of the culture as a whole. Whereas the western civilisation undergone a significant amount of disenchantment of rationalisation giving rise to modern capitalism.

### c) Ancient Judaism

For Weber, the development of Judaism was important for the profound impact it had on the beginnings of the Western Civilisation. It is historically important being the source of Christianity and Islam. Weber finds the religious norms of Judaism as having rational-ethical character. It has a highly rational religious ethic of social conduct free of magic and all forms of irrational quest for salvation. According to the Jewish religious conception, God created the world and intervened in the history; the world in its present form was a result of God's reaction to the actions of men particularly the Jews. The present condition of toil, trouble, misery and suffering, the opposite of that promised for the future was temporary and would give away to the truly God-ordained order. The whole attitude of ancient Jewry towards life was determined by this conception of future God-guided social and political revolution (Zeitlen, Irvin).

Weber studied Judaism to explore the influence of religious ideas on social existence and development, but, as he done with the study of other religions, against the backdrop of social, economic and political structures. From his studies he concludes although the Jews had produced a rational religious ethic, which influenced Western culture at its roots, this did not lead to rational economic conduct, as did Puritanism. The reasons for this is different form those, which found in the Asiatic religions. The peculiar ethical dualism of the Jews, their in-group out-group morality, prevented this; for allegedly it permitted, or was morally indifferent to certain forms of behaviour toward the outsiders which were strictly with respect to brothers in belief.

## 7.9 Weber's Primordial Notions of Religion

Weber elaborates the basic tenets of sociology of religion in his work *Economy and Society*. He makes a distinction between magic and religion. Religions begin to take shape when people relate to the divine entities

through prayer, worship and supplication - activities that are different from magic. Magical forces are not worshipped, but are subordinated to human needs by the use of charms or formulae. The distinction between religion and magic corresponds to a status and power differentiation of considerable historical importance, between priests on the one hand and the magicians or the sorcerers on the other.

Weber observed that while participating in religion and magic people distinguishes between those objects and beings, which have special qualities (sacred) and those which belong to the world or ordinary (profane). He felt only certain objects possesses religious properties and certain people, though a few only, able to attain state of inspiration and grace which endow them with religious powers. These extra ordinary powers are the charisma.

## 7.10 The Religious Specialists

Max Weber in his comparative study on world religions talks extensively about the religious specialists as agents of social transformation or conservation of tradition. He makes distinctions between the roles and functions of religious functionaries such as priest, magician and prophet.

*Priest:* A priest according to Weber is a functionary who performs regular, permanent and organized functions that are related to divine. He does this usually through the act of worship either on behalf of an individual or for the society as a whole. The priest belongs to a social organisation and occupies a hereditary office. He is expected to have some specialised knowledge of texts and doctrines. According to Weber priest would have attained significant social and religious status through both rigorous training and by virtue of being born into a particular social group.

*Magician:* Weber believed the relationship between the human and the supernatural could be expressed not just through religious worship assisted by a priest but also through magical chants or sorcery. It is in the magic that the prayer and sacrifice have their origin. The magician is understood by Weber as dealing with evil spirits on an individual level. His efforts may have both positive and negative consequences. The magician is self employed though he may be the member of a hereditary caste or an organised guild. Rather than using a specialised doctrine of knowledge, magician may derive his influence by virtue of personal gifts and knowledge of the supernatural world. What makes the magician different form priest is the absence of large number of followers.

*Prophet:* For him prophet is an individual who is capable of proclaiming a religious doctrine or a divine commandment because of his charismatic qualities. The major difference between the priest and prophet is that the prophet regards his mission as a personal call and derives his authority from the personal revelation and charisma or an exceptional quality. The core of the prophet's mission is to carry forward the commandment or doctrine he has received as revelation.

Most of Weber's writings on prophets and prophecy are related to Judaism and Israeli society the place where the prophets of social justice emerged. In Israel prophets were a relatively autonomous stratum. They were religious practitioners with strictly religious interests. In Weber's view rationalisation was a consequence of the prophet's unceasing war against magical and orgiastic practices, which they did on the basis of their unwavering devotion to Yahwe - the God of Jews.

### a) Criticisms

Critiques pointed out several questions on Weber's theory of development of modern economic system. Weber finds a correlation between the ascetic Protestantism and rational capitalism. One major criticism to this is that this correlation is so small as to be insignificant. Some even argued that there is no correlation at all. Kurt Samulsson with evidence shows that, while there is some truth in the proposition that Protestant countries were more vigorous economically than the catholic countries, none of the regions reveals the symmetry Weber imputed to them. Furthermore, he argues, so many qualifications are necessary as to make Weber's hypothesis taken as a whole untenable.

Dickson and Mc Lachlan critiques of Weber argue that he misinterpreted Franklin's writings as moral ends when they were simply virtues to be practiced because of the benefits they will bring to those who practice them. They deny that Franklin was preaching a Protestant work ethic and assert that all Franklin was saying was that if a person is interested in being successful in life and commerce, here are some virtues to follow. Most of the other criticisms of Weber rest on his assertion that modern capitalism could not have flourished in Europe without an ethic or spirit, which had its roots in ascetic Protestantism. These criticisms themselves fall into two major categories: (1) that capitalism was a growing force before the Reformation and that it would have thrived as well under Catholicism as under Protestantism, and (2) that the driving force behind capitalism was not ascetism but rationality.

R. H. Tawney, Weber's most famous critic, agreed with Weber that capitalism and Protestantism were connected. However, Tawney saw the connection going in the opposite direction from that which Weber postulated. Tawney, in his 1926 work, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, states that Protestantism adopted the risk-taking, profit-making ethic of capitalism, not the other way around.

## 7.11 Conclusion

The unit starts with a brief discussion on Weber's methodology for studying human society - the methodology that Weber applies to economic ethic in the religious activities of human beings. Through his studies he tried to establish the relationship between modern rational capitalism and the religious ethics of Protestantism. For Weber, capitalism was more than simply an accumulation of wealth. He identified the "spirit" of capitalism, which in his view consists of a disciplined labor force, and the regularised (re)investment of capital. Weber asserted that this combination took place only in Europe and most strongly in Protestant nations, such as England, Holland, and Germany, where there were influential groups of ascetic Protestant sects.

Weber hypothesised that capitalism was a product of the western mind. According to him the Protestant Ethic spawned and encouraged what Weber called the "spirit of capitalism". For Weber the spirit of capitalism is more than simply capitalist activity. It is, in fact, the essence, which underlies the economic system. During the long 16th century, this spirit became embodied in European society and provided the impetus for capitalism, to emerge as the dominant economic system in the world.

Weber studied other world religion to establish the relationship between the protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism. The reason he gives why rational capitalism did not develop in other parts of the world is the lack

of this religious ethic in other religions around the world. The unit elicits these aspects elaborately. It also provides an account of the major criticisms put against the theorisations of Weber.

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## Unit 8

# M. N. Srinivas : The Coorgs

### Contents

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 A Coorg Village
- 8.3 Legacy of the Coorgs
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- 8.5 Tribes and Caste in Coorg
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- 8.8 Conclusion
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### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to,

- describe a Coorg village;
- outline the legacy of the Coorgs;
- describe and discuss the Okka; and
- discuss aspects of Hinduism.

## 8.1 Introduction

Coorg is a 'tiny' province in South India. To its north and east are the Kannada speaking districts of Mysore State and to its south and west Tamil speaking districts of Tamilnadu. Coorg is an inaccessible mountainous region with heavy rainfall, flooded rivers and dense forest.

The total land area of Coorg is 1,593 square miles of which considerable portion is under Reserve forest. Western Ghats mountains pass through Coorg. Brahmagiri and Puspagiri are important places on the main range of Western Ghats. The river Kaveri springs from Brahmagiri and Kanake, its tributary joins it at Bhagamandala. The rivers are fordable after rainy season. They are not navigable and their waters are not used for irrigation.

It is natural that the Coorgs have a distinct mode of life and culture as the region remained isolated for centuries because of its steep mounts and dense forests. But the Lingayat Rajas took advantage of this isolation and conquered the country in the ninth century A.D. they tried to keep it isolated as Coorg is a rice growing area. The people of Coorg had regular contacts with their neighbours and visited them to sell their surplus produce in Malabar market. They brought articles of their daily use in return for their rice. Their visits to Mysore and other religious places of Hindu shrines and temples were regular.

Richter, one of the earlier writers on Coorg reports:

"The general appearance of the country varies considerably in different districts. In the vicinity of Somwarpet, in the alternating with sloping glades, interspersed with clumps of forest trees resembling the finest

park in Europe. Bear Meraara, the hills are closer together and more abrupt, and the ravines deeper and more wild. Towards frazerpet, the country assumes the champaign character of Mysore plateau, with scattered solitary hills. South of Meraara in the direction of Virarajpet, especially in Beppunad, Kadiyettanad, the country is open, the woods are neither dense nor high and beautiful glassy downs, rise from extensive rice valleys". The eastern frontier between the Kaveri and Lakshamana-Tirtha exhibits an almost uninterrupted and impervious forest."

## 8.2 A Coorg Village

A village in Coorg is different from a village in Andhra Pradesh, Mysore and Tamilnadu. It is "a group of houses and huts huddled together in a confined space with fields and gardens stretching all around". In Coorg proper every Coorg house is built on its ancestral estate and near it live the servants of the house who are generally of a very low caste.

The ancestral house is usually a substantial Building of stones and, mortar with solid carved wood-work. Masons and carpenters of Malabar build such massive houses. Coorg ancestral house resembles the houses of well-to-do Nayars. The house generally stands on an elevation and narrow high way walled winding lane and keep as many as 250-300 members.

The ancestral estate included some jungle, grazing land valleys for rice cultivation. The main building had kitchen garden near it. There was also a pond or well to provide water for domestic purposes.

The ancestral estate had a shrine dedicated the Okka ancestor. Some stones representing cobras were planted on the platform.

There are only two towns in Coorg. Mercara, the capital has a population of 7112 and Virarajpet has 4106 persons.

The language spoken by Coorg is Kodagi. It is an independent language. However, it is closely connected with Kannada and in part with the language of Malabar coast. Kannada was the official and court language of Coorg under the Lingayat Rajas. It is medium of instruction in schools today.

## 8.3 Legacy of the Coorgs

The Coorg lived in isolation for a very long time. In the ninth century A.D. They were attacked and conquered by the invaders belonging to the Changalva and Kongalva dynasties. The Changalvas occupied and established their rule in some areas of northern Coorg, with their capital at Bednur. The Kongalvas were in possession of some parts of the east. Both these dynasties became feudatory to the ruling Gangas of Mysore took the eleventh century. The rulers of these dynasties were Jains by faith. In the eleventh century they became feudatory to the Chungalva. In the meanwhile the Changolvas changed their religion and accepted Lingayatism or Sivism.

After the fall of the Gangas, a new dynasty rose to power in western Mysore called Hyosalas. The Hyosala drove the Cholas out of Mysore. The Changalvas refused to accept the over lordship of the Gangas and Hyosalas and claimed independence. Several battles were fought between these dynasties. Srinivas mentioned that these battles were important because the Coorgs fought these battles with the Changalvas against the invaders from Mysore. In the last battle the Changalvas ruler was killed and his elephants, horses and gold were captured by the Hyosalas. After this

defeat the Changalvas withdraw into Coorg. In 1174, the Hyosala sent an army general called Battarasa to attack the Changalvas and to drive them out of Coor. In the battle that followsd Battarasa sustained heavy losses, but in the end he was successful in subduing the enemy. He established his capital at Balpore.

Allads of Coorg gathered together and fought against Battarasa inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. The Hyosala rule continued till it was attacked and subdued by Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan. The Muslim rulers took advantage of succession disputes and attacked Coorg. The prince of Bednur was transferred to Gorur and was put under confinernment.

The prince of Bednur escaped from Gorur and reached Coorg. The Coorgs rallied round him and Vira Raja occupied whole of Coorg in 1834.

The prince of Bednur ruled Coorg till 1809. He had no male issue. This raised the problem of succession. The brother of dead king was triumphant in 1811 and when he died in 1820, his son, a 20 year old, Chkka Vira Raj was the ruler of Bednur. He was an incompetent ruler. He was sensuous tyrant. In 1834 the British annexed Coorg and thus it was the end of the rule of Lingayat Rajas.

- i) Thus, we find that the authority of Coorg chieftains or Nayakas was destroyed under the Jain invaders.
- ii) The administration was centralized.
- iii) A postal service was established.
- iv) Land survey was made; details of forms were recorded in the Hukum Nama.
- v) Serious offences like adultery, murder and theasion were heard by the Raja himself.

The struggle with Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan increased the sense national identity of the inhabitants of Coorg.

### Reflection and Action 8.1

Discuss about the leagacy of the Coorgs. In what way do you find it to be unique? Discuss and write down in your notebook.

Tippu Sultan died in 1799. At that time Vira Raja<sup>4</sup> was in power. He helped the English in their war against Mysore. Vira Raja died in 1809, leaving behind only daughters. This lead to the inevitable succession disputes.

## 8.4 Land Tenure System

The land tenure prevalent in Coorg was quite favourable for Coorgs to maintain and develop a military tradition of their own. Land revenue was the principal source of the Lingayat Rajas. The assessment of land was made on the basis of survey and the classification of cultivated land in Coorg. Similar survey was made during the reign of Linga Raja. This settlement was recorded in a book called the Hukum Nama. Most Coorgs held land under this military tradition. The term Jañma is a corrupt form of the Sariskrit word Janma meaning birth. It was hereditary and the right to the property passes from father to his son.

After 1834, the British introduced the following changes in the Coorg society:

- 1) Abolition of slavery. Slavery was abolished through it did not affect the land holding Coorg. The slaves were free to choose their work.
- 2) Another important change was the introduction of coffee plantations. Coffee plantations increased the demand for labour. The slaves deserted their masters and joined the plantations.
- 3) Coffee became important next only to rice. Coffee plantation changed the face of Coorg. It brought foreign planters who settled down in Coorg.
- 4) Coffee plantation changed the master-slave relation. The slaves were no more bound to their Coorg masters.
- 5) Seasonal flow of labour from Mysore and other areas increased. Thus Coorg became a place for labour market.
- 6) Naturally coffee plantation brought money to planters and work to labourers.

According to 1941 census there were two sub-division among Coorg. The first division consisted of 41,026 and the second had only 666 individuals. The latter called themselves Amma Kudagas or Amma Coorg. The Amma Coorg are a highly Brahmanised group of Coorg society.

The Amma Coorg are said to be the descendants of a Coorg man and a Brahmin girl of Wynad. She was the daughter of Tayikat Tambiran. Tayikat Tambrain espelled his daughter from his house as she had attained puberty before marriage. To keep a daughter who attains puberty before marriage in the past was a serious offence. It was sinful and shameful. Born of this union came to be known as Amma Coorgs.

During the reign of the last Raja of Coorg, Amma Coorgs claimed to be kaveri Brahmins. They claimed to be the descendants of the Brahmin disciple of the sage Agastya, husband of kaveri, before the latter flowed away as a river.

In the recent past there were two subdivisions called Sanna Coorg and Malla Coorg. The Sanna Coorgs were the descendants of inter-marriage between the ruling Lingayats and the Coorgs.

## 8.5 Tribes and Caste in Coorg

There were more than forty tribes and castes in Coorg, but Coorgs were in regular contact with (1) the Brahmin priest (2) the Kaniyas or astrologers (3) Banna (Oracle) (4) Blacksmith (5) Carpenter (6) Goldsmith (7) Washerman (8) Barber (9) Poleya or farm servant (10) Meda. In this section we discuss how Coorgs relate themselves to each of these caste groups.

"Under the Lingayat Rajas Coorgs formed the aristocracy. They held important acknowledge their dominance of taking over customs and manners and their speech". The peasant castes of Karnataka and Gandas of South India tried to pass off for Coorgs.

The Coorgs were a compact unit in relation to other castes. The Coorgs were powerful, economically and politically. They engaged themselves in dancing, competitive games. They were skilful in hunting and soldering. These were the attributes of the kshatriyas of Vedic or classical caste system. Prof. Srinivas maintains that the resemblance between Coorgs and Vedic Kshatriyas is striking in the matters of values and "it is understandable that Coorgs should regard themselves as kshatriyas. He adds that Coorgs do not perform any Vedic ritual, vedic mantras. They do

not recite vedic mantras at the naming ceremony, at marriage or at the funeral. They abstain from eating beef. Their dietary includes pork and liquor.

The Brahmins, kaniyas and Bannas are three important castes in ritual context. The Brahmins are priests in great shrines at Tala kaveri, Bhagmandla and Irpu and at other small temples. The Coorg offer rice balls to their ancestors at the sacred place Tala kaveri. This is done under the guidance of a Brahmin priest. Payment to the priest is made annually at harvest. Every Coorg house in the village makes a certain quantity of paddy. The Brahmin is in no way different from other service castes.

**Blacksmith & Carpenters:** 1) Make agricultural implements and other articles of domestic use.

2) Build massive houses for Coorgs.

3) They make biers and palanquins used on ritual occasions.

4) A sickle used on the occasion of cutting of sheaves.

**Goldsmith:** 1) Makes articles of gold and silver ornaments.

2) Bores ears of boys and girls.

3) Ear boring was an initiation rite in the past.

**Washerman** Clothes washed by a Washerman are ritually pure such clothes must be worn on ritual occasions. His services are essential on ritual occasions.

1) Supplies clean clothes for bridal pair to walk on.

2) Supplies a cloth to spread on the bridal seat to cover the ceiling.

3) Supplies clothes at the village festival.

4) Purifies ritual pollution caused by birth or death.

**Barber:** The barber defiles a Coorg. The Coorg undergoes a ritual bath after his shave. Such bath restores the Coorgs normal ritual status.

1) The barbers services are indispensable at the time of birth and death.

2) Shaving is an essential preliminary act for men on ritual occasions.

**Meda:** The Meda is an artisan who supplies artifacts like baskets, fish traps and receptacles of cane, reed or bamboo.

1) His presence is indispensable at Coorg festival dance or hunt.

2) He brings a basket and bamboo vessel for the festival .

3) He beats his tom-tom.

### Reflection and Action 8.2

Is Srinivas writing about varna or caste? Justify your answer in writing and discussion.

**Poleya:** 1) The poleya farm servant observes ritual mourning for his Coorg master.

2) He is given gifts at the termination of mourning.

3) He holds torch at Coorg wedding.

4) He does most of the work on Coorg farms.

## 8.6 The Okka

The Okka is the basic unit of Coorg society.' It is a patrilineal and patrilocal joint family. Only male members have any right in the right ancestral estate. Similarly, it is only son who can continue the Okka.

Women born in the Okka cease to be the member of their natal Okka on their marriage. Women who became members of their conjugal Okka do not have any special rights in their conjugal Okka. However, they may marry their husband's younger brother and retain their membership in their conjugal or in their natal Okka.

Sexes are segregated among Coorgs. The outer verandah may be used as a club for men only and woman use kitchen or some inner room to receive guests.

During the harvest festival and the festival of village deities men sing and dance and women watch them from a distance.

For men the ideals are strength, skill in fighting and hunting and courage. Killing a tiger or panther gets a man the honour of mangala ceremony. According to a proverb; Men should die on the battle field and women in child-bed.

Coorg men supervise the cultivation of land while low caste labourers do much of the work on the fields. The army has greater attraction for the Coorg.

"The Coorg Okka seems to be stronger and more sharply structured than the joint family in South India, with the possible exception of the matrilineal Taravad of the Nayars and the patrilineal Illam of the Nambudris. Other territorial groups among the Coorg are the Village and Nad. There are 35 Nads and Kombus in Coorg.

"Every society has a body of ritual and certain ritual acts forming the body of ritual repeat themselves constantly. Now only ritual acts, but also ritual complexes, which are wholes made up of several individual acts, frequency repeat themselves, several such ritual complexes and some individual ritual acts might be together knit into a still wider ritual whole which repeats itself occasionally."

For instance salutation is an individual ritual acts. It may be two kinds, simple and elaborate. In the simple ritual acts a man may fold his hands at his chest and utter Namaskar if the two person involves are equals. In an elaborate ritual act of salutation. The man may bend down up to his knees, touch the feet of an elderly man or woman and carry his hands up to his forehead, at least once. If a person is before a deity, he may bend down to touch the earth and carry his hand upto his forehead three times. Salutation of the elaborate kind is only one of several ritual acts in the ritual complex of murta is again a part of mangala.

### Box 8.1: Mangala and Coorgs

There are several kinds of mangala in the past, but now it has been narrowed down to mean exclusively marriage and this is a fairly recent phenomenon.

The astrologer selects the auspicious day and time to murta. Generally, it is performed in the central hall of the ancestral house. The house is colour washed and decorated. A pandal of five pillars is erected. One of the pillars is of the milk exuding tree. Tom-toms are beaten by the

poleys servants and mudas. Four coorgs play their musical instrument called dudi. The songs sung on the occasion are traditional and are exaggerated. All this shows the social importance of the occasion. It also shows the movement of social status of the person undergoing the murta ceremony.

The person for whom mangala is to be performed is seated on a tripod stool stood in the central hall of the ancestral home. He is in a pure ritual condition as he had a shave and a ritual bath and is in his ritually pure robes. Two lamps are burning on other side of subject. A thired stool covered with a red silk cloth is also there. On this stool in dish which contains a burning lamp placed on a rice platform and a vessel containing some milk.

Three woman whose husbands are alive perform murta individually. The woman takes rice from the dish and sprinkles at the lamps some from over her shoulders. She then salutes the sun. She takes the vessel from the dish and causes it up to the subjects mouth. The subject sucks some milk from the spout of the vessel. The subject salutes the lamps. The subject touches the feet of the woman and she given him/her some silver or gold coins blessing a long and happy life. In the past mangala was performed on various occasions.

**Examples :** (1) Ear boring mangala for boys and girls. (2) Puberby mangala. (3) First pregnancy mangala. (4) A woman whose ten children are alive. (5) Tiger mangala. (6) Plantain mangala. (7) House mangala. (8) Ox mangala. (9) Corpse of a bachelor. All these are defunct today. Mangala today means marriage mangala.

The external world is divided into two parts, the sacred and non-sacred. The term sacred includes good sacredness and bad sacredness. Good sacred means all forms of ritually desirable conditions like auspiciousness and purity forms of ritually undesirable states and condition such as inauspiciousness and impurity.

In kodagi dialect pole means ritual impurity, Generally, its specific forms may be *kurudu pole* (bling pollution or and *Tinga pole* (monthly pollution). *Kurudu pole* refers to the impurity of a woman in her monthly periods and *kurudu pole* is birth pollution. In the same way death pollution is called *Tike* and *Tomme* means mourning and *Namme* is festival.

All over India a higher caste person does not touch or come very close to a member of a lower caste because of the structural distance if it is very great. A higher cast person is in a condition of ritual purity in relation to a number of lower casts. The concepts of ritual purity and impurity systematise and maintain distance between different castes. The brahmin is in the condition ritual purity in relation to all other castes. The untouchables on the other hand are in a condition of impurity to castes above them.

The coorg regard their ancestral estate sacred. A coorg is not allowed to walk wearing sandals. The most sacred places on the estate are the ancestor shrine and the cobra platform. A woman in her monthly periods may not go near the cobra platforms the cobra deity is very sensitive to pollution.

The ancestral house has an out house in which a woman stayed for three days during her periods. On the fourth month day she attained her normal ritual states after a bath.

Certain part of the ancestral house are more sacred than other parts. The central halls one such place which is very sacred. In the western wall of the central hall is a nich for burning on earthen lamp. The lamp faces east, the sacred direction. This lamp is known as *Nallakk Boluk*. The south western room and the kitchen are also sacred.

The Brahmin priest may go into all parts of the ancestral house. The polaya and meda may go up to pavement in front of the house.

The concepts of ritural purity and impurity are intimately related to the permanent features of the social structure, like casts and okka and also to village they also occur in non- structural contexts.

A man is in a state of purity while praying or sacrificing to an ancestor or deity. He attains ritural purity by taking a bath, wearing ritually pure clothes. He comes into contact with a deity when he is praying. A mourner also offers food to the spirit of a dead person. He is also in an extreme condition of ritual purity though he is in ritural state of tike, death pollution.

Bodily emissions and waste matter are riturally impure. Intercourse makes a man and a woman impure and polluted. The priests at ketrappa has to observe continence during 21st days at the festival. They are required to sleep in the outer verandah where women do not enter. A call of nature pollutes a person. Spittle is also ritually impure. A man should not touch his teeth. Enji is the term for spittle in Kodagi. Nail and hair paring are impure. If scattered in the house poverty will result.

A Coorg may pare his finger and toenails. He cannot cut his hair. This is the job of a barber. The barber defiles a Coorg. The latter purifies himself by taking a ritual bath and wearing pure clothes. The place where the barber sat is purified faces; urine semen menstrual blood, spittle and paring of nails and hair are ritually impure. Physical dirt is identified with ritual impurity.

Birth and death result impurity. A corpse is ritually impure and contact with it result in pollution. The crow is associated with death and is also impure. The spirits of death ancestors assume the forms of crows on certain occasion particularly when rice balls are offered to them. If a crow seen mating bring death. He sends a false latter announcing his death. Mating of crows means their increase and it means a likely death of the person. It dropping of crow fall on someone, s/he will have to dip in tank a thousand times.

Bad sacredness is a wider concept than pollution or ritual impurity. Degrees of ritual impurity are:

- a) Childbirth result in a mild form of pollution. Member of the Okka regain their normal status after 7<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> days the body on the 60<sup>th</sup> day. Temple visiting is avoided by Okka members.
- b) Tike or death pollution is an acute form of pollution while purudu pole are milk from of it.
- c) Madi and pole are deviations from the normal. The washer man takes away clothes and returns madivala.

Ritual impurity, normal ritual state and ritual purity from a hierarchy. Normal ritual status is a mild from of impurity.

## 8.7 Aspects of Hinduism

The structural basis of Hinduism is the caste system. Caste system means a hierachial arrangement of caste, with the Brahmin at the top of the

ladder and the untouchable at the bottom of it. Prof. Srinivas sees this as a fusion of Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic ritual and beliefs. It is common to come across castes with both Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic ritual and belief at the same time. These may vary from caste to caste and region to region. In this background it becomes easy to understand why some people worship trees, plants, mountains, rivers, caste ancestors and village deities etc.

Hinduism has a profound philosophy of its own. Its Upanishads, Vedanta and the mysticism of Bhakti Schools are well-known. Caste system has been so powerful that even some reformist sects have become castes. Jains and Lingayats are the examples. However, some lower castes groups by Sanskritizing their rites have raised their social status in the caste hierarchy. The Coorgs for instance.

It is also true that wiles and beliefs have changed in the process of Sankritization. This change may be seen within and outside Hinduism.

### **Box 8.2: Analysis of Hinduism**

The Sankritic Hinduism has two aspects, the intellectual and the ordinary. The intellectual Hinduism has the Upanishads, the Gita and the philosophical systems and for the ordinary Hindus numerous feasts, tastes, vratas, pilgrimages, temples and shrines are the stuff of Hinduism. The great literary works like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas and the teachings of Saints are also there.

For analytical purposes Hinduism may be made into (1) All India Hinduism (2) Peninsular Hinduism (3) Regional Hinduism and the (4) Local Hinduism.

The ritual and cultural form of sanskritic Hinduism may be spread all over India. The Brahmins share some sanskritic ritual and cultural forms in common all over India.

Some ritual and cultural form are peculiar to a particular to south India, the Kaveri myth for instance.

Regional Hinduism refers to the ritual and cultural forms found in Malabar, south Canara and Coorg.

A small areas in north of Coorg called Coorg proper comes under the local Hinduism.

All India Hinduism may be seen as having horizontal spread in which there is unity and solidarity among the Brahmins.

All India Hinduism spreads in two ways: (1) In the first instance the sanskritic deities extended their ritual and cultural forms. In the second the groups undergo greater sankritization of ritual and beliefs. When the sankritic deities extend their area, these deities assume different forms in their travel all over India. In case of greater sanskritization in groups inside Hinduism local deities assume "Sanskritic labels" the vedic deity Kshetrapala becomes Ketzappa in Coorg.

The All-India Hinduism absorbs local features with greater ease. The Kaveri myth is the example in which ideas of sin virtue are attached to them. The Ganga myth becomes a model for the Kaveri myth.

According to Coorgs folklore, Malabar Coasts was created by Parashurama. Malabar is a strange country. The people here behave in an unpredictable way.

The Coorg folk songs report that deities migrated from Malabar into Coorg. They migrate to Coorg for shelter. Some important deities are:

- 1) Achehayya - - - Vishnu - - - a form of Bhagvati.
- 2) Achchayya - - - Laxmu - - - for Coorgs Laxmi is the wife of Madava.
- 3) Madava - - - Shiva - - - has a shrine in every nad.
- 4) Povvedi Bhagvati - - - (Parvati)- - - has a shrine in every village.
- 5) Kanyamatappa
- 6) Tirchanbarappa
- 7) Bendrukellappa
- 8) Pannangalamme (F)- - - kartandaokka- - - she is a deity worshipped by Poleya lower cast.
- 9) Lgguttapa - - - for Coorgs he is Sulnamanya.
- 10) Pallurapa - - - for Coorgs he is Vishnu.
- 11) Tirndli pemmayya - - - he guards against man; the deity of epidemics.

Marriage is preferred condition among Coorgs. Social status of a married man is higher than that of a bachelor. There is no difference between married woman and a remarried widow.

The Brahmin and the Coorg are similar attitude towards widowhood.

The woman with all her ten children alive is entitled to a special honour.

The festival of arms comes at the end of the field season. The astroloser decides the day and time of worshipping weapons. The head of the Okka hands over the weapons from the ancestral building to Coorgs and says to them: "Fight a tiger and boar by stepping aside the charging lease. Do not underrate your enemy, fight him face to face, stand by your friend be obedient to the king and do forget god. "He fires a shot his gun in the direction of woods.

The head of the Okka is in charge of a pack of dogs. He feeds them regularly.

Competitions are held on the village green. Men shot at targets. Men are asked to cut through the three plantains stems planted very close to each with stoke of the sword. There are also a high-jump and stone throwing competitons.

All the adult males have to participate in the collective hunt. This is held after the festival of arms.

Coorgs believe than Aujiyappa, the son of Vishnu and Shiva, roams about forest at night whistling to the pack of dogs. The Coorgs offer clay image of dogs and horse in shrine in jungle.

The material orientation of cords culture is not a recent phenomenon. About 1300 Coorgs joined the army as soldiers to fight in the last war. It is interesting to note that the first Indian commander-in-chief of the Indian Army Journal K.M. Cariappa was a Coorg.

## 8.8 Conclusion

Preference for a particular way life expresses itself in belief, ritual and myth. Coorg is an agricultural country and the Coorg community is directly dependent on land. Coffee was introduced about a hundred years ago.

Coorgs were pre-occupied with the cultivation of rice from May to January. May was the proper time for the first ploughing of fields. Harvesting of the crop was done in January. After harvesting it was time to participate in the festival of village deities. It was also time for some man to go to Malabar for the sale of their surplus rice. Thus the social activities of a Coorg revolved round and adjusted themselves to the cultivation of rice and the sale of surplus in Malabar.

Rice field is the most important part of an ancestral estate. It is sacred a Coorg is not allowed to walk on it wearing his sandals. He is not allowed to enter the ancestral shrine or a temple with his sandals on.

Every stage of cultivation of rice is marked by a ritual. The main plot of the ancestral rice-field is ritually ploughed on a particular day and decided by the Brahmin priest of Sulnamanya temple. Regular ploughing takes place after the ritual ploughing on the New Year Day.

Stages of the cultivation of the rice crop are ploughing, sowing, plucking of young plants and their transplantation, harvesting, storing the crop in the granary. Then follows the Kaveri festival. A part of it is called bottu which is intended to protect the growing crop, woods on the estate.

Putri is another important festival of Coorgs when the paddy sheaves are ritually cut. The festival lasts for nine to ten days. Seven days previous to sheaf-cutting singing, dancing and playing games are the main activities. After sheaf-cutting there is a domestic feast, a dance and sports and a collective hunt and a dinner for the village or nad.

On the festival day, leaves of different plants and creepers are gathered. These are kept near a dish-lamp in a harvest-basket. In a new bamboo vessel some milk, honey and gli are poured and a new sickle is kept in it. The sheaf-cutter carries the bamboo-vessel to the field followed by other members. The rice plant is worshipped and everyone shouts poli, poli, deva (increase, increase, O God) and a shot is fired from a gun. The sheaf-cutter reaches horne. His feet are washed and given milk to drink.

Prof. Srinivas opines that these rites performed at the harvest festival stress the great value of rice to Coorg.

On the New Year Day a cold of ploughed earth is brought home and deposited in the granary. At the sight of paddy in the ear, a man says "saw paddy in the ear O granary, there is going to be pumper crop". These become *akahaya patra*, the mytrical vessel of increase.

## 8.9 Further Reading

T.R.Singh: *Some Aspects of Ritual Purity and Pollution*, The Eastern Anthropologist Vol. I. 1966.

T.R. Singh: *Hierarchy of Deities in an A.P. Village* in L.P. Bidyarthi: Some Aspects of Religion in India, 1962.

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## Unit 9

# Evans Pritchard: The Nuer

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### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- describe the concept of Cuong;
- outline the notion of soul and ghost;
- discuss the concept of sin and sacrifice; and
- outline the role of priests and prophets.

### 9.1 Introduction

The Nuer live in Sudan and according to Pritchard calls themselves as *Nath*. They are about twenty lakhs in number. They are tall, long limbed, and narrow headed. They are from Nilotic group of East-African Cultural type. Their religion is very complicated and is different from the other tribal religion. As we move further, we will be able to distinguish it from other tribal religion. The Nuer calls the god "Kwoth" meaning spirit. The *Kwoth* represents both the intangible quality of air, and the breathing or blowing out of air. According to Nuer, God is a kind of spirit, which like wind and air is invisible and ubiquitous. They believe that though God is not these things but God is in them in the sense that he reveals himself through them. It means he is in rain, sky, shines in sun and moon. God also blows in the wind. Nuer pathetically compare to heavenly things. Human beings are earthly person, in Nuer word *ran piny*. According to Nuer general view, the ghosts are not the persons of the sky or some heavenly body but they essentially reside on earth, and only God resides on sky. God is in the sky, but it does not show that he is not at the same time elsewhere, and on earth. God according to them is omnipresent and omniscient, and thus God may be on earth too. Nuers says that God is everywhere, and he is like wind and like air. God is only the creator and mover of all earthly things. There are many spirits but unlike other spirits God has no prophets or sanctuaries or earthly forms.

Thus we can say that the Nuer conceive God as a creative spirit. Pritchard writes that he has never heard Nuers suggest that God has Human form.

But God being ubiquitous and invisible, can see and hears all that happens and he can be angry and can love also. The most common word to address the God and deity is "gwandong", a word which means "grandfather" or ancestor, and literally old father. Thus god is the father of the man in two respects, firstly he is their creator and secondly he is also their protector.

God is also protector as the Nuer feel that man is fully dependent on God and man is helpless without his aid and that God, though a friend and present in yet he is also remote from the human beings. Nuer frequently use the word "doar" which means idiot, stupid, fool, and weak minded. Actually, while praying, Nuer says that they are just ignorant people who do not understand the mysteries of life and death. They also not able to understand the meaning of God and the spirits and why things happen as they do.

## 9.2 Concept of Cuong

The word can mean 'upright' in the sense of standing, as for example, in reference to the support of byres. It also used figuratively for 'firmly established' as in phrase "be gok cuong" means 'may his hearth stand'. It is most commonly employed however, with the meaning of 'in the right' in both a forensic and moral sense. According to Pritchard, the concept of cuong is important for two reasons. First, it relates directly to man's behaviour towards God and other spiritual beings along with God and ghosts, secondly, it relates to God in a more indirect way, in that he is regarded as the founder and guardian of morality. The Nuer say that God may forgive and overlook what was done in error similarly they believe that god will pardon a man and not allow a curse to harm a man who has done no deliberate wrong. When a Nuer suffers they sometimes at once know what the cause of their suffering is because they are well aware of some particular fault. If some misfortune falls on them they then know that it is due to the anger of the spirit.

Nuer religion is closely connected with the animal sacrifices. Their prayers are most commonly heard on public and formal occasions, generally, in connection of the sacrifices. If they are in any trouble or anxiety, the head of the Nuer household may pace up and down his kraal brandishing his spear and uttering some supplications. He may less formally, see them standing or squatting with his eyes turned towards heaven and his arms outstretched from the elbows, moving his hands, palms upper most, up and down.

The most common phrase in Nuer prayer and of one with which they start their prayer is "akonienko". This literally means "let us sleep" but here this means "let us be at peace". The commonest of the Nuer greetings and when others are said, the first to be spoken is "ci nien" means "have you slept?" the saluted man replies to this, as to others greetings by a grunt of affirmation. This means have you rested or are you at ease? The Nuer regarded being at ease or at peace as having something to do with being in friendship with God is shown by a further question which may follow: "cipal" means have you prayed? Pritchard says that the idea implied here is that being at peace with God as well as with your fellow beings.

Nuer speak of life as walking through pastures and they ask for a path that has no hidden dangers, that is, the path is free from every evil. The general sense of the prayer is that God should protect those who supplicate him as a parent protects his helpless infants. This desire for peace, deliverance and protection is summed up in a common petition "akoteko"

means "let us be". Nuer ask for life, but this life should not be just life in the sense of living but of living abundantly, free from all types of troubles and other types of sufferings.

### 9.3 The Notion of Spirit

In Nuer religion the concept of spirit is of utmost importance. The spirits play an important role because spirits live in sky as well as in the earth too. The spirits for them are of two types, those of the above and those of the below. The spirit of the above is called as "*Kuth nhial*". In other words they are the spirits of the air or of the breezes. The spirit of the air is the most powerful spirit of all the known spirits for them. The spirits of the below are called as "*kuth piny*" Renuer believes that all spirits who are from earth or who are on the earth have fallen from above. The spirits of the below can thus be classified into a number of separate categories, like totemic spirits, totemistic spirits, nature spirits, and other fetishes. There is one spirit called by name "*col*", is associated with rain, lightening. The Nuer has a number of quite different spiritual conceptions. In general, Nuer use the word *kwoth* either in the sense of God or in the sense of one or other spirits of the above or of the below. When Nuer prays to God, they usually address him simply *kwoth* in Nuer totemism, they respect the natural species or class of objects because they regard them as being in some manner emblem or representation of spirit. God may figure in numerous ways in reference to social groups and to persons and in relations to effects which are significant for them. The main reason, why Nuer divide the spirits into two kinds, viz; colwic spirit and bieli spirits means spirits of above and the spirits of below respectively and so forth is that they regard them as different sorts of manifestation of spirits and of varying degree of importance. In other words we can say that the conception of *kwoth* has a structural dimension. At one end spirit is thought of in relation to man and the world in general as omnipotent God. It is the thought of in relation to a variety of social groups and activities and to categories of persons. At the other end it is concieved of more or less in relation to individuals in a private capacity as nature spirits and fetishes. God figured as common father and creator is patron of all men; figured in spirits of air he is also patron of political leaders; is figured in colwic and totemic spirits, and also in unnamed refractions, he is patron of lineages and families; and figured in nature spirit and fetishes and he is patron of individuals.

Evans Pritchard writes that a totemic or totemistic spirit sometimes gives a man certain powers over the totemic species. The rites these people perform might be classed according to some definitions of the term as magic. Nuer does not regard all manifestations of spirit as of equal value, nor do they accept all claims to spiritual guidance at their face value.

The role of medicines is very minimum in the Nuer society rather they believe in the religious rites for their treatments. Nuer medicines do not derive their power from spirit. Pritchard says that Nuer medicines of today are mostly of the nature of talismans for torture-in hunting, fishing, courting, and travelling. Medicines are also used sometimes as infusions, to protect a person from, or cure him of sickness brought about by breach of an interdiction. Nuers also have few samples for treating common ailments, such as constipation, throat or lung complaints, fevers and swellings, and for treating sick cattles. These medicines are thought to be efficacious only in very small matters or as secondary to the performance of religious rites. This means, religion for them is primary activity in treatment of diseases and other form of ailments and medicines are only

effective if the God is happy with them. So in other words God acts like protector in the time of diseases and the medicine is only a means to them.

God for Nuer is the father of every type of higher spirits of the air, and the lesser of them are said to be the children of his sons, of his lineage. According to Pritchard, in a typically Nuer way they represent the interrelationship of the spirits in a genealogical metaphor. The totemic spirits are often said to be the children of Gods daughter, i.e. they are not of his lineage. The fetishes come lowest of all in the representation of children of daughters of the air spirit which is called “*deng*”.

### Box 9.1: Relationship between Spirits

The interrelationship of spirits is represented also in symbolism of height and space, or more accurately in relation of sky to earth. God is thus symbolised by sky and the spirits of the air by the atmosphere, the clouds, and the breezes. On the other hand, the lesser spirits are represented by their nearness to the earth than the greater one. The totemic spirits as spirits are above and as creatures are below. The fetishes are the most earthly of the spirits. Even according to Nuer some fetishes are also beneath the ground. One of the remarkable things about the Nuer is that they do not claim to see the God, nor do they think that anyone can know what he is like in himself. God has no human form. God can be conceived of as in the sky. The celestial phenomena which are of particular significance for Nuer is rain and lightening, because they see a direct influence of God in these type of things. So we can say that the conception of spirit has a social dimension. The spirits plays a significant and most crucial role in the Nuer social structure according to Evans Pritchard.

## 9.4 Soul and Ghost

In Nuer terminology *tie* means soul. They are very afraid of death. They avoid as far as possible speaking of death and when they have to do so they speak about it in such a way as to leave no doubt that they regard it as the most dreadful thing. *Yiegh* means both ‘breath’ and ‘life’. Thus a man *yiegh may* be stronger or weaker according to the circumstances. If the person is sick he possesses weak *yiegh*, the stronger *yiegh* is for a healthy person. When the person is drunk, he is partially dead, but it is such a death for which the person will not mourn. They believe that life comes from God and when a person dies the God takes back his life as his right. So Nuer regard that when a person die the God has taken his own thing as his own right, because the life of a person is given by the God and it is his right to take it back. Pritchard writes that Nuers presumably see an analogy between a man is shadow and his soul. For them shadow is the best way they can find to figure the sort of things the soul might be. The analogy may derive from the idea of ghosts being shadowy replicas of the living. The fact that other creatures and things have shadows does not lead Nuer to say that they have souls; and since they have no souls, in their case the shadows does not at any time have a figurative meaning. There is a strange thing about Nuer that if a twin child born they regard that they have one soul with two bodies.

According to them only human beings have souls and not other creatures. They regard that only cattles and elephants have soul. The other remarkable thing about Nuers is that they are little interested in the dead mans

ghosts, so long as the ghost does not cause any trouble. The word for ghost in Nuer terminology is *Joagh*, for them the word closely denote plagues, pestilences, murrains and indeed any serious sickness. But they believe that these diseases not occur due to ghost but God has given these. So we can say that the ghosts are not very important in their lives, but they cannot entirely ignore the existence of ghosts in their lives. For them the spirits are far superior to the ghosts and the ghosts are subordinate to spirits. So they do not pray to the ghosts, because they consider that they have no power in themselves to grant requests.

### Reflection and Action 9.1

Differentiate between soul and ghost among the Nuer. Note down the points in your diary.

When suppose a ghost comes to trouble the living, it is said to *cien* them. It means bitt, to curse, because both words are closely connected, the ability of ghost to harm being the post mortem operation of the projective power of the psyche, the power to harm another through the mind and the heart. In Nuer society the concept of curse is very important. In Nuer society the curse of certain person is believed to be effective if they have been wronged. If they utter curse without due cause the curse will be either ineffective or harm the speakers of them. Among various curses the curse of fathers and mothers are very serious. On the other hand the blessings are thought to be effective only because God makes them so. According to them just as the curse is an imprecatory prayer, so a prayer is implied in a blessing. It is a benedictory prayer. Pritchard says that the religious significance of cursing and blessings lies in a dominant motif of Nuer religion.

## 9.5 Concept of Sin

According to Evans Pritchard, sin is the central concept to the study of Nuer religion. Nuers want God to be near as well as far from them, because it is very dangerous to them. The Nuer conception of *theik* is very important in the understanding of their religion. Nuer uses this word for the attitude and behaviour expected of a man towards his wife's parents and to a lesser extent her other kinsmen also. A newly married woman respects her husband's people, especially his parents. Newly wedded wife and husband respect each other. There are also avoidances concerning bridewealth cattle which derive from these relationships of respects relating to marriage. A bride respects the *ghot lipe* means the cattle of her betrothal. These are the cattles her future husband hands over in earnest of his intention to marry her, and then count as the first payment of her bridewealth. She will not drink of their milk, lest she harms the cattle by doing so, till after the ritual consummation of the union, and not even then. Similarly, even when a husband can drink milk in the home of his parent in law they avoid offering milk from the cattle he has paid them.

Nuer uses the word *rual* for some incestuous relations. The incestuous relationships are also a type of sin for them. The degree of the sin varies with the closeness and distance of the relationships with whom the incestuous relationships are made. If any incest is done to any close relative, then even death may follow soon, possibly within a few days, while if they are very distantly related nothing untoward may happen. Nuer does not object to love relationships and love affair as before marriage so long as they are reasonably discreet in them. Thus we can say that adultery is a

sin and when committed by somebody, the pollution and its effects can spread beyond those directly concerned in it. The accused including husband and wife are dangerous to anybody they come into contact, if they are the party of any adultery. There is a provision that once the sin is confessed, its effect and consequences become less. For incest the Nuer word is *Rual*. *Nuesr* is a breach of certain interdictions, and it is also the violent sickness which follows the breach. Different diseases have different names, but if the sin which brought sickness about is known as the name of that particular sin.

A certain *duer* or fault bring about certain divine punishment. It may do so through the action of the curse or of ghostly vengeance. Nuer seems to regard moral faults as accumulating and creating a condition of the person predisposing him to disaster, which may then fall upon him on account of some acts or omission which might not otherwise and by itself have brought it about. There are two types of violations, first the fault which have moral or legal ingredients and second a religious fault.

To quote Pritchard, ‘though the notion of *Kwoth* is a ubiquitous as the air to which it is likened and may be evoked in relation to any question of right and wrong there are differences between its association with such sins as incest or eating with the persons with whom one is at feud and its association with faults which have a moral or legal, rather than a religious character, such as lack of deference to an elder or refusal to pay a debt. When an action of the first kind, which is a sinful act, has been committed it is likely, if it is thought to be a serious transgression, to lead to sacrifice before any effects follow from it. This would not happen in the case of faults of the second type. Nuer does not say that any incestuous relationship with kinswomen is bad and thus God will punish it but according to them God causes misfortune to follow it and therefore it is bad. Thus it is bad not in itself but in its consequences. Homicide is not forbidden in them and they say that it is not wrong to kill a man in a fair fight. On the contrary, if a man slays another in combat is admired for his courage and fighting skill. In other words the ethical significance of sin lies in the violation of the interdiction.

## 9.6 Concept of Sacrifice

Pritchard consider the sacrifice as the most typical and expressive act of the Nuer religion. The sacrifice is made on the numerous occasions by them. When suppose a man is sick or he has committed any type of sin they will sacrifice for it in order to eliminate that particular sin and its consequences. They also do the act of sacrifice when a wife is barren. Sometimes they sacrifice, when there is the birth of the first child, at the birth of the twins, at marriage ceremony, at funerals etc. Evans-Pritchard categorised these several types of sins in two main broad categories. They are as follows:

- (i) Personal sacrifice.
- (ii) Collective sacrifice.

### Box 9.2: Varieties of Sacrifice

In personal sacrifice the sacrifice offered is for single individuals and for the personal causes. And the collective sacrifices are offered for the social groups. Most of the sacrifices are made to prevent some dangers hanging over the people. The primary function according to

Pritchard of the collective sacrifice is to confirm, to establish or to add strength to, a change of social status, boy to man, maiden to wife, living man to ghost, or a new relationship between social groups—the coming of being a new age-set, and the ending of a blood feud. So Pritchard says that the collective sacrifices have a marked structural character. Sacrifices may be made on behalf of the whole community, as in the time of epidemic, but they are made for a great number of individuals. In other words, these sacrifices are indicative of the social activities and social order and it is on the contrary not indicative of relation between men and their natural environment. Their sacrifices are concerned with moral and spiritual, not natural crisis. Sacrifices are made for the God and it is not offered to any Ghosts in Nuer religion. But ghosts must be summoned as witnesses and the matter must be explained to them properly, because it concerns the ghosts also. Ghosts are of course present there but they are present only as a witness as the human being is and what is explained to them is explained to the human being also.

The main sacrificial animal is generally ox, but a barren cow may take the place of the ox also. If there is a closing of a blood feud bulls are sacrificed. This is the only occasion where bulls may be sacrificed. Apart from these oxen, goats, and cows some other beasts may be sacrificed according to the seriousness of the problem. Normally, the head of the family can officiate at personal sacrifice. One thing is clear that women and the children cannot make sacrifices rather they may assist in these acts of consecration. Personal sacrifices may be done any time if the need arises, but the normal time for the sacrifice is the morning and the evening. Before the animal is sacrificed, the entire act of sacrifice passes through four main stages:

- (i) Presentation.
- (ii) Consecration.
- (iii) Invocation.
- (iv) Immolation.

The first act is called the *pwot*, the driving into the ground of a tethering-peg and the tethering of the animal to it. Then the officiate presents the victim to the God. The individual who stakes the animal is called *pwot yang*, the tetherer of cow. Sometimes, after the victim has been staked, a libation of milk, beer or water, is poured over, or at the foot of the peg.

The act of consecration involves the rubbing with ashes. The man who is about to speak the first invocation rubs ashes of cattle-dung lightly on the victim's back. The man does this exercise with his right hand. This is the only step involved in this stage.

In the third stage i.e., invocation, the sacrificer holds spear in his hand and speaks to God over the consecrated victim. This stage states the intention of the sacrifice and the other matters related to this.

In the last stage which is called immolation or *kam yang* in Nuer language which means giving or offering of the victim when speaking of the personal sacrifices. It is called the *nak* when there is a collective sacrifice. One remarkable thing about the sacrifice is that they do not wait for the animal to urinate before killing it. When the victim is ox, it is speared on the right side. Sheep and goats have their throat cut.

A good sacrifice is one when the victim feels well. It should also preferably fall on its right side. The idea of the sacrifice is that when a Nuer is in trouble or they suffer from some sort of illness, they say that when an ox is sacrificed there is the idea that the evil goes into the ox and then into the earth with its blood. In personal sacrifices the animals are the substitutes for men. To this extent sacrifice is an exchange according to Pritchard, but he says that it is also very much more than just a simple exchange.

The cattle play a vital role in the lives of the Nuer. Thus, among cattle the ox is regarded one of the most respected cattle. Ox names are essentially the name of the men. Married women use cow names among themselves. Normally, a man retains his ox name and continues to be called by it, even the ox is departed from mans life. When the ox is departed the Nuer feels immense sorrow. It is the name of that ox that a man shouts out in war, hunting, dancing. Even the men are addressed by his peers. Even when the ox is long before dead, the relationships continue.

Thus when an ox is sacrificed, it in actual sense is substituted for man. Cattles are otherwise very much significant for Nuer. The sacrificial role of cattle is always dormant in cattle, which in sacrifice are being used for an ordained purpose for which they are set apart. Normally, as it is already mentioned above that the women cannot make sacrifice and the men are entitled to do this, among men only the head of the household or some senior members can make sacrifices. The collective sacrifices are made by a person called *gwan buthni*, which means the master of the ceremony. *The gwan buthni* or the master of ceremony functions at the marriages, and in other Nuer rituals and ceremonies. On these ceremonies he calls out the clan or lineage spear name and then makes an invocation, usually before the animal sacrifice. Actually when he utters the spear name it symbolises the lineage representation or it represents the whole clan. Evans-Pritchard says that the role of the *gwan buthni* in the sacrificial ceremony is seen to be a social rather than of religious kind.

## 9.7 Priests and Prophets

The role of the priests and prophets are not that crucial as in other societies. When there is a sacrifice made for any particular sin committed by the Nuer, the role of priest is desirable. Especially the leopard skin priests are important for them. The leopard skin priests are called as *kuaar* in their local language. But in this society, the priests have no politico-administrative rights like other tribal society. Nuer do not highly esteem cultivation of crops and may be presumed to have engaged in it even less in the past when cattles were more numerous. The priests are associated with the earth. This is a representation which accords with the general idea of man being identified with the earth and the God with the sky. The priest being essentially a person who sacrifices on behalf of man below to God above. Actually the leopard skin priests are not concerned with members of the clan, rather, they are in the category of *rul* means they are strangers. It also shows that their clans are different from the clans for which they serve as the priests.

### Reflection and Action 9.2

In which way do priest and prophets figure in Nuer religion? Discuss and write in your notebook.

Pritchard tells us about two main priestly clans i) Goatleak, and ii) Jimem. These priests have no fixed territories, but live as family and small lineages

in most or all territories owned by other clans. These leopard skin priests are not connected with any clans because they are the priests who sometimes settle the old bloody feud between different groups among the Nuers, and thus they act as a neutral judge for them. The main function which a priest performs is with homicide and the importance of his office derives from this essential function, he is the only person who can perform this function. As soon as a man kills another in fight, he immediately contacts the nearest priest, and the priest then arranges for the cow sacrifice to lessen the sin committed by that person who kills another man. The priest acts as a middle man, in case there is a blood feud. Once the priest intervenes in this case nobody can suspect on the role of the priest. In other words everybody of the clan shows an unquestionable faith in him and his judgement. The leopard skin priest conducts the oath taking ceremony also. If a man denies that he has killed and suppose he is the real killer then he has to undergo an ordeal by drinking milk from the head of the dead man handed to him by the priest in the presence of the dead man's kith and kins. It is assumed that if the person is lying then he will soon die in this process. If a man kills another and he is not confessing for his crime, then in the eye of the Nuer it is the most heinous crime and a great offence. So in the Nuer society the act of confession is very crucial, and is very important for them to ward off the sin if they have committed any.

The leopard skin priest may be called any time if close relatives commit incest. To wash this sin the priest then sacrifice an ox. The priest consecrates the ox, makes an invocation over it to the God that may God spare the partners to the sin and the offence may depart with the blood of the victim. The beast is then held down on the ground and then priest inserts his spear in its throat and cuts towards the breast. As the priest makes the final cuts the parties to the offence tug at the carcass on either side and pull it apart. In these two parts one half is taken by the priest and the second half is taken by the relatives of the principals. The priest squeezes out the gall from the victim's gall-bladder into water in a gourd, adds incest medicine i.e., *wal ruali* and the principal and their relatives drink this mixture.

The sacrifices which are in connection with homicide, ordeals and serious incest are the exclusive domain of the leopard skin priests. Pritchard says that after examining the critical situations in which the priest is called upon to exercise his functions, then one can regard it either as a political institution functioning within a religious ideas and values. But one thing about this religion is clear that the presence of the priesthood adds nothing to the dominant ideas of Nuer religion. It is rather these ideas which give to a political role, its necessary attributes. In other words, Pritchard says that priests perform certain politico-religious functions, but their religion is not intrinsically a priestly religion like other tribal societies and cultures.

In Nuer a religion the role of prophets is also important and according to Pritchard a prophet is a person who is possessed by a spirit of the air or occasionally a *colwic spirit*. This possession gives him the spiritual powers which others lack, including the leopard skin priests. He compares prophets with priests. A priest is a traditional functionary whereas the prophet is a recent development. The priest acts at sacrificial functions, whereas the prophets' roles are indeterminate. The priests powers are transmitted by descent from the first priest - a social heritage; the prophets powers are charismatic-an individual inspiration. The virtue of the priest resides in his office, whereas that of prophet in himself. The priest has no cultic feature whereas the prophet has cultic features. The priest stands on the earth and looks to the sky whereas the heavenly beings descend from the

sky and fill the prophets. Thus the prophet is the mouthpiece of the spirit, its interpreter, it is who speaks but he speaks under its control.

Pritchard further says that Nuer regards priests and prophets as very different sorts of persons, they do not think of them as being opposed to one another. A prophet may heal the people by rubbing his spittle on them or by sprinkling them with water, milk or butter and his inspiration gives him foreknowledge. But Nuer relies on sacrifice in the times of trouble, which is being done by the leopard skin priests.

## 9.8 Conclusion

Thus after reviewing their religious practices we have seen that the God conception is essentially related with the concept of *kwoth*, the spirit. According to them whatever happens in the world is determined by spirits and the spirits can be influenced by different types of prayers and sacrifices. Pritchard terms the Nuer religion as pneumatic and theistic. Whether it can be defined as the monotheistic is largely a matter of definition. He further writes that at one level Nuer religion may be regarded as monotheistic and on the other level as polytheistic, and it can also be regarded as totemistic or fetishistic.

The religion of Nuers is different from their African counterparts according to Pritchard as the conception of ancestral ghosts is altogether subordinate. Animistic ideas are almost entirely absent; witchcraft ideas play a very minor role, and magic a negligible role. Likewise it is understandable that there is no idea of an impersonal force which are the characteristic of some African religions. Another negative feature of Nuer religion is the absence of the ritual of all types, in the sense of ceremonial, interdictions, so prominent among other African religion. Nuer interdictions are not of a ritual order at all, but of a moral one, so that the breaches of them result in a state of moral impurity or in other words sin, of which the resultant situation and the manifestation may be sickness or other misfortune. They consider that the God is great and men are foolish and they are helpless and are like a helpless ant. And this sense of dependence is remarkably individualistic. It is an intimate and personal relationship between man and the God. Man in Nuer religion always plays a passive role. There is nothing Nuer can say of the nature of God other than that he is like wind or air.

## 9.9 Further Reading

Lieut-Colonial, Count Gleichen,(1905). *The Anglo- Egyptian Sudan*, 2 volumes.

Major C.H.Stigand, (1918). *Warrior classes of the Nuers*, S.N. &R.

E.E. Evans, Pritchards (1933). *The Nuer, Tribe and Clans*, S.N. &R.

## **Unit 10**

# **T. N. Madan: Non- Renunciation**

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### **Learning Objectives**

After studying this unit you should be able to;

- describe domesticity and detachment;
- discuss the concepts of auspiciousness and purity;
- describe the three stories that are analysed; and
- outline the concepts of living and dying.

### **10.1 Introduction**

The work of T.N.Madan is an ethnographical work taking into account the religious patterns of Kashmiri pandits. The work is based on mainly three sources; first the writer's own intensive fieldwork, second, the important written ethnographical works on the Hindu practices of the brahmins of Uttar Pradesh, Orrisa, and Karnataka, and the third one is contemporary works on fiction dealing with ancient and recent times in Bihar, North India, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. As brahmins are the custodian of the Hindu religion the book is largely based on their interpretation of the religion, but this book is about the entire Hindu society. The writer has taken the help of the novels on the Hindu society and come up with the sociological interpretation. In this book an excellent description is done on the good way of life and death in the Hindu society and it also throws light on the different relationships between husband and wife, father and son, renunciation of the householder's life, concepts of auspiciousness and other social and cultural practices of the Brahmins. The writer has stressed on the fact that the life of the householder is considered as the prime value in the Hindu society. The Hindu society since long time has found a moral dilemma between philosophical and the mythological tradition. The renouncer and the enjoyers are both towering personalities. The main thrust of the book is then the interpretations of a view which is tradition based and the life of the man in the world as the good life in contrast to

the life of a renouncer. The entire book is divided among five chapters taking into account the different views on the themes of Hindu religion and cultural practices.

## 10.2 Domesticity and Detachment

The conflict between domestic life and detached life is always a central theme of Hinduism. In pandit society the householders keeps a central position in everyday life. Pandits perceive the human being as the creature who can introspect and reflect and according to them this is the central character which distinguishes human being from the other living creatures. A good Hindu should always perform his social role according to the Dharma. To be identified as the pandit they themselves define their external and internal characteristics. The Kashmiri pandits are called as the Bhatta, which means a learned person. They usually keep his *tuft* of the head top hair. They also wear the cotton thread which is called as *yajnopavita*. Their speech is often laden with Sanskrit.

The pandits are divided into several sub-castes. These sub-castes are helpful in the marriage and other types of the hierarchies in day to day life. The identity of the pandit cannot be acquired by any other means other than he is born in the pandit caste only. One loses the identity of pandit by totally abandoning the traditional way of life, or the important and crucial elements of it, as when one eats and lives with muslims or marries among them.

### a) Parenthood: Biology and Morality

The parenthood is very important in the pandit way of life. Barrenness is recognised as a physical deficiency, which may be due to the Karmic causes. This may be due to diseases, sorcery or the curse of the people endowed with supernatural powers. It is believed that male seed contains the entire vital requirement for the making of the complete human beings: flesh, blood, all internal and external organs, hair, nail, intellect, and knowledge. The mother's menstrual blood provides the soil for the seed to grow in when it ceases to flow out and solidifies into the fleshy sack which envelops and nourishes the foetus. The Kashmiri women are said to be child worshippers. Mother for the child is both the human and the divine power. On the other hand the father child relationship is moral, but it has material dimension also. Because the ancestral property of the family is being shared by both father and son. In other words we can say that the relationship between a child and the parent is bound in terms of the dharma.

### b) The Concept of Bhattil

Kashmiri pandits consider the bhattil way of life as the most superior way of life. It is constituted of a range of fundamental purposes of life largely centred in the domestic life, and the appropriate procedures for their fulfilment. For pandits the physical self is not that important as the inner self, as the body is fragile and will be destroyed certainly, but the atma or the inner self cannot be destroyed. When the body is joined to the inner self (*antaratma*) then it becomes the vehicle of the dharma. They attribute the present life difficulties as the result of the previous life adharmath body which is considered as the meeting point between the past, present and the future. The auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are the two things on which the pandits whole life hinges upon. The inauspicious moments are deaths, eclipses; the hooting of owl etc. and they are also not avoidable. The pandits are expected to take the maximum patience and restraint.

They are also expected under the bhattil to be ever ready to present to resist the compulsions of bodily appetites until assured of their proper satisfaction as defined in the bhattil. The questioning attitude, the exercise of restraint, and the cultivation of the moral consciousness provide the framework within which a pandit has to order his life. The basis of the conduct should be of thoughtful discrimination. The pandit's attitude to the wordly concerns and rewards is one of the joyful acceptance. They do not seek immediate release from the present life, but try to accumulate merits for the future. Though they consider karma as the chain of bondage, but due to this reason it is not unwelcome. One's attitude should not be filled with the ego and thus one should surrender oneself to the God.

All actions should be performed according to the set procedure and conventions. There are three fires of the domestic life, they are as follows:

- i) The fire in the hearth.
- ii) The fire lit periodically to perform rituals.
- iii) The fire of the body.

### 10.3 Life Cycle Rituals

There are several life cycle rituals like childhood ritual of the purification, which is performed on the eleventh day of the birth of the baby, the ritual of the feeding of the first solid meals which is called *annaprasana*, the ritual of the first tonsure of the child called *zarakasai*, the *yajnopavita* ceremony in which the child take the holy thread. The next step is marriage which is the principal sanskara of an adult life. Marriage stands out as the central ritual and social event in the life of every individual, which enables one to take the role of the householder and this is what is required for the renunciation in the Brahminical life. The last and ultimate step is the rite of cremation, which is followed by post-mortuary rites. Apart from these life cycle rites the routine chores and rites of everyday life which are in other words called as *nityakarma* are the abiding concern of every individual pandit and constitute the important and ever present element of his bhattil. *Nityakarmas* also includes the observance of death and birth anniversaries of the ancestors, the discharge of other social obligations etc. Thus Madan says that the pandit way of life is moralistic and the life is mainly based on the good karma which is guided by the dharmic principles.

#### Box 10.1: Bhakti and Shakti

If there is any lapse which has been occurred in the domestic life, it can be corrected by the help of the Bhakti. Bhakti is not an alternative way of life but a particular orientation of the householder's life. The pandits consider bhakti as a value in itself. To get the power of divine love and affection one need not have to abandon the family. The love of God is not exclusive and does not require withdrawal. The prayer of Shakti is also a means through which a pandit tries to take the strength in his daily life. The Shakti can be aroused and rises to the head and enables the seeker to realise his own divinity. The ordinary rule of the bhattil does not apply to the sakta. There cannot be a family of the sakta but he may live in his exclusive household of its own, consisting of his family members. It is an alternative way of life.

In the society of Kashmiri Brahmins there is no concept of living away from the home, ofcourse some individuals may live away from home but they do not go through formal initiation into any sanyasi order. There is

no emphasis on the termination of the grihastha ashrama in one's life. The attitudes of pandits towards those who make claim of detachment and particularly of renunciation are generally one of scepticism. In fact, the pandits reduce the renouncer to a caricature of his ideal self.

Thus the greatest ambition of the pandit is to become the householder and perform his karma which is backed by dharma. The ideology of everyday life clearly establishes the pandit as the grihastha. The householder is the man-in-world. As a householder, a pandit may legitimately seek plentitude and joy but only if this endeavour is controlled by dharma. Bhattil is a total view of life which excludes nothing but it is a hierachial view of both the ultimate purpose of life, and the task of everyday existence.

## 10.4 Concepts of Auspiciousness and Purity

Madan has tried to clarify the notion of 'auspiciousness' in relation to the notion of purity. According to him the notion of *subha* refers directly to time and temporal events in relation to particular categories of people. A time which may be considered auspicious for one kind of action may not necessarily consider auspicious for the other kind of action. The other use of the word is in using the word with some special occasions or festivals. There may be several *subha* months and days in a month. *Subha* is also employed to refer happy events in life like marriage, birth of a son, etc. the notion of *subha* is also associated with the places and the direction. A pilgrimage centre which is situated near the holy river bank is considered as the *subha* to take the holy dip there. Certain objects in pandits, society is also considered as the *subha* objects like *kalsa* means a metal or earthen vessel containing the water of the holy rivers like Ganga. The *Kalsa* is associated with the commencement of a ritual of religious and social value. The *grahas* are categorised into two categorises viz; *subha* and *asubha* category. Among the nine *grahas* only three *grahas* namely, *brahaspati*, *chandrama*, and *sukra* are considered as the *subha grahas*. *Budha* is considered as the impotent and neutral *graha*.

### Reflection and Action 10.1

In which way is auspiciousness different from the notion of purity?  
Discuss and note down the main points in your notebook.

The birth of a child particularly the son is considered as the *subha* event, but it is not always a *subha* moment; rather it depends on the position of the particular *grahas* and their position at the time of birth. If the position of *asubha graha* are present at the time of the birth of the child, there may be need to correct it with the help of various rituals. In fact the Brahmins perform regular rituals to ward off the evil *grahas* in their home. These rituals are called commonly as *upayas* or in other words the corrective ritual measures. So we can say that the birth in general is considered as the *subha* event and the death is always considered as the *asubha* event. But there is a degree of inauspiciousness in the event of the death. If the death is occurred in the *subha* days its degree of inauspiciousness is less than the which death occurred in the auspicious days. Death is very inauspicious but widowhood is an even more unfortunate event for the Brahmin women. There are many drastic changes which occur in the status of the women whose husband dies. She cannot take part in any auspicious event including marriage and the birth ceremonies. Auspiciousness is an absolute value which manifests as a quality of events in the lives of human actors and involves the dimension of time and space.

The most pure and sacred thing is the *yajnopavita*, the three stranded cotton neck cord that he wears from the time of his ritual initiation and this also symbolises that he is a twice born caste and is different and far superior to other castes. After the completion of the *yajnopavita* ceremony only the Brahmin can take part in other types of rituals. In other words this ritual grants them the power to take part in the day to day ritual ceremonies. Madan writes that the daily life of a Kashmiri Brahmin is beset by *sanka* or doubt. There is always hesitation as to whether to perform a particular action or not. In Uttar Pradesh the encounter with a *Mahabrahmin* (a type of Brahmin who performs rituals at the time of death) is considered as the inauspicious event. The Brahmins of both Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir consider milk as the purest drink according to Madan. Thus, we can say that the notion of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are very important in the everyday life of the people. Madan writes further that the particular expressions and associations of the notion of auspiciousness may vary, but quite clearly it is of basic importance, at least in the schemes of values of the upper castes.

## 10.5 The Notion of Asceticism and Eroticism

The notion of asceticism and eroticism are described with the help of three novels. The first is 'Chitralekha' from Bhagvaticharan Varma, the second is a Karnatic novel namely, 'Samskara' written by U.R. Anantha Murthy and later translated in English by A.K. Ramanujan, the third novel is a Marathi novel namely 'Yayati' by Vishnu Shangram Khandekar and translated in Hindi by Moreswar Tapasvi. We will discuss all the three stories in brief.

The story of Chitralekha is based on the concept of papa and punya. There were two disciples of a Guru, who wanted to know the difference between the papa and punya. The guru says that he does not know what is papa, because he didn't have the personal experience of it. He on the contrary sends these two disciples to discover for themselves the concept of papa and punya. The two disciples were from the two upper castes one was from the Brahmin caste and the other one was a Kshatriya. The Brahmin became the disciple of a great yogi called Kumaragiri and the Kshatriya became a servant to a feudal lord namely, Bijagupta.

The yogi Kumaragiri claims that he is free from the bodily desires and attachments. He claims that because of his detachment from the desires, he possesses a good moral character. On the other hand, Bijagupta is opposite of the Kumaragiri and he possesses all types of bodily desires and joys of the wordly things. He is attracted to a famous dancer namely, Chitralekha. Though Chitralekha is a dancer by profession she is an intelligent and cultured woman. The dancer and Bijagupta live together fulfilling each other's bodily appetites. Once they Bijagupta and Chitralekha by chance meet Kumaragiri and seek shelter into his hermitage for one night. Kumaragiri though did not want to give shelter to any woman but out of compulsion he had to give the shelter to a woman. Kumaragiri considers the women as the darkness of the attachment, desire and illusion. After some time this leads to a thorough discussion between Chitralekha and him. After the discussion, Kumaragiri was much impressed and his conception about women was transformed and produced a positive attitude about them.

After further discussion, Chitralekha won the argument and Kumaragiri, felt that despite his being a Yogi he has been defeated by a fallen woman, a dancer, but Chitralekha came again to his hermitage and told that she has come to receive spiritual instruction by him, but actually she was in

love with him. Chitralekha tries to teach Kumaragiri a view of the nature of woman contrary to that enunciated by him at their first meeting. She says that woman is a source of Shakti and main source of creation. Slowly, Kumaragiri begins to experience, besides the power of her intellect, the attraction of her bodily beauty. Finally, Chitralekha decides to leave Bijagupta. Later on Bijagupta met another woman namely, Yashodhara, but he already was in love with Chitralekha, and did not want to marry Yashodhara. For him this was a question of moral judgement and according to him marriage is not a simple event rather an ever-lasting physical-cum-spiritual bond between man and a woman. On the other hand Chitralekha started living in the hermitage of Kumaragiri and genuinely shared interest in spiritualism and finally he falls in her love. Now Kumaragiri's conception of renunciation has been changed and according to him the real renouncer must include the love of all beings. In this process Kumaragiri lied to Chitralekha that Bijagupta had married to Yashodhara. This was like a shock to Chitralekha and she gives herself up to Kumaragiri. Finally, Bijagupta considered that Chitralekha left him on her own choice and started getting attracted towards Yashodhara. But after some time Bijagupta didn't marry Yashodhara too and become a renouncer after donating her entire wealth to Yashodhara's new husband. Later on Chitralekha came to know the truth and then left Kumaragiri and finally joined Bijagupta in the quest of the spirit.

Finally, the both disciples of the guru had returned to their ashram. The guru thus started interpreting that human beings are not autonomous moral agents at all; they are not free and are bound by different situations in life. According to him people neither commit sins nor performs meritorious acts, but they simply do what they have to act according to the situations in life.

## 10.6 The Story of Samskara

The story of Samskara is from a Karnataka hamlet called Durvasapura. There lived two Brahmins, Praneshacharya and Naranappa. Praneshacharya wanted to be free from all the passions. When he was at the age of 16 he married a 12 year old girl, who was born as an invalid child. He had done this to earn austerity and self sacrifice. He thus became engaged in all types of ritual works and started living as a ideal sadhu. Everybody in the village even older persons started giving due respect to him due to his knowledge and humanity. On the other hand Narappa was a corrupt brahmin and was married to a low caste woman. His mother was a prostitute in her time. He consumed meat and liquor. One day he died of the plague. According to rule till his body is cremated nobody of the village will eat, but there was a problem in his cremation, because nobody wanted to take part in his cremation as he was a corrupt Brahmin. Finally, the villagers came to Pranesacharya for advice, but as the task was very complicated, he also could not come out with any type of solution. In the meantime Narrapa's wife Chandri unable to withstand the hunger ate some fruits and drank water from the flowing river without anybody's knowledge.

Chandri awaits Pranescharya's verdict and thanks his gentleness and kindness. Chandri was childless and she recalls that her mother used to say that prostitutes should get pregnant by holy men such as Pranescharya. But Pranescharya was not able to get the solution of the cremation of Narappa's body and in the mean time his dead body started rotting. In this process Chandri came into the contact of Pranescharya and made a sexual contact with him, hoping she would be able to bear a child and her evil will be washed off. Finally, she with the help of a Muslim friend

cremated the body of Narappa, without anybody's knowledge. But Praneshacharya goes back to his home filled with remorse and guilt but internally he is relieved by the sexual contact with one prostitute. He also felt a lightness in the thought even that he had left desire, desire had not left him. Finally, Praneshacharya told the villagers that he is lost and he is no more a acharya. He finally left the village, his home. He thinks that he is now free without duties or debts. The writer of this story thus concludes that authenticity, rather than an opposition between eroticism and asceticism, as the ultimate criteria of moral choices.

## 10.7 The Story of Yayati

The third story Yayati is based on one episode of the great epic Mahabharata. Yayati is a king's son. He has a brother also who became renouncer and left the home. Thus his mother takes a promise that he will never leave the home and never become a renouncer like her elder son Yati. As the years progresses Yati became a talented prince, and later on persuaded his father to perform *asvamedha*, the horse sacrifice of world conquest and victory. In the course of his wanderings he meets a *recluse* engaged in the mortification of his body. Actually he happens to be his brother Yati who in his early days became renouncer. Yati says that this body is source of all types of evils and is the main hinderance in the path of spirituality. Yayati's next encounter is with a young man, namely, Kach, who was the son of Brihaspati, guru of the Gods. Kach's viewpoint was that we should not exclude the wordly pursuits like artha, kama and other pleasures as it is the dharma of a man. Later on Kach became the pupil of Sukracharya. Sukracharya's daughter, Devyani falls in love with Kach. But he started avoiding her because her presence will hamper him in the path of the spiritual quest. He also wins the affection of Sharmistha the daughter of the king of demons. He then confesses his love for Devyani but adds that the true love must make one look beyond one's own self. Love is thus not opposed to duty but absorbed into it. Finally Devyani meets Yayati and asks him to marry her and Yayati married Devyani. But their relation as husband and wife was a strained one and their soul was not in unision. Internally, Devyani keeps her love alive for Kach, and one day on the pretext of some ritual performance she invited Kach. Kach came with Yati, whose behaviour was strange to every body. The strange behaviour was due to the fact that in the course of his renouncement he had abandoned his human behaviour. Man acquires merit not by denying the existence of the body but by refining the body appetites and bringing them under the control of his will. Finally as the relationship between Devyani and Yayati was strained, as Yayati was attracted towards Sharmistha and mutual love develops between them. Later on by knowing the fact Devyani forbids Yayati to touch her body. The writer of the story thus suggests that only true moral basis of wordly life can be self-sacrifice, which is what detachment is all about, and not self seeking.

T.N.Madan thus writes that all the three stories question a dualistic conception of the moral domain, therefore, of the viability of the choices which are based on a notion of papa and punya. Morality is thus not an external condition, a mere attribute of the human conduct, but an inner wisdom, a mental state, from which all our acts should flow naturally without an effort of will. Thus the householder should live by the morality of purusartha, as given in the three values of dharma, kama, and artha.

## 10.8 The Desired and the Good

In the course of studying the pandits of Kashmir, Madan finds one thing repeatedly that is the concern for problem of suffering, i.e., Duhkha,

they also expiate the causes of these duhkahs. In general it is considered that the cause of every duhkha is the wrong doing by the person. However, these wrongs can be committed in the ignorance and delusion. As pandits believe that the pursuits of worldly pleasures is perfectly legitimate provided it is carried according to dharma. We should thus end our ignorance. Those who attain the moral perfection and discipline does not suffer from the agony of having to face moral dilemmas, he is free from having to make choices. Wrong doings are not committed in a social vacuum: interpersonal relations of the most intimate kinds such as between husband and wife, between parent and child is their principal locus. Moreover, different degrees of wrong doings are recognised, ranging from the ordinary faulty actions to those which are judged as morally reprehensible and evil. What is true to the Kashmiri, a pandit is likely to be true of the other Brahmin communities also.

### Box 10.2: Appu's Early Years

T.N.Madan has chosen one novel of T. Janakiraman namely "The Sins of the Appu." The story starts with Appu who is the third and last legitimate child of his mother Alankaram. His other brothers were from the other fathers. Appu's father name was Dandapani, who by profession was an astrologer. Dandapani is a learned person and teaches Sanskrit to some retired person in the city of Madras. On the other hand Alankaram though not a well read woman is an attractive and well built woman. Appu was his mother's favourite child and thus she paid special attention in his upbringing and nurture. She wanted to give him the real education and wanted Appu to learn Veda, and become the scholar of it. Dandapani though opposed to this ideas finally agreed to send Appu for the Vedic study. After 16 years Appu, an adept in the Vedic scholarship was back in his home. Actually, Alankaram wanted that her sins should be washed off as she was not a moral woman, but later on became *pativrata*. Alankaram had hoped to atone for her moral lapse by ensuring the moral perfection of her son and then serving him and thus become herself purified.

Appu wanted to stay on in the village where he learned the Veda, because he is repelled by a morally amorphous city. He also came to know the truth that both his mother and father are morally infirm. Appu was filled with lots of moral and immoral questions about his mother and father. Realising that Appu would not come home; Alankaram visits him in the village. She tells Appu that she is going north far from Madras, to the sacred city of Kashi, to await her death there. Finally, Alankaram goes to Kashi. Alankaram now wants renunciation through divine grace.

Appu met two women at the village Vedic school-its benefactress, Bhavaniammal and her brother's daughter, Indu. Indu was married to one man, but her husband dies soon and she became widow. After the completion of his studies Appu returned to his home to fulfil his familial obligations, but he got the news that Bhavaniammal suffered a paralytic stroke. He rushed back to the village but she was out of danger now and she requested him to stay in the village and teach the children as there were no teachers to teach in the school. Finally Appu accepts the request of Bhavaniammal and, Appu opted to live in the same house where Indu lives and he confessed his love for Indu.

Thus human beings live in the socially created world and the social order becomes the cosmo-moral order. Though one does not choose one's parent, a person may still be faced with a situation involving choice between alternative modes of relating to them. If these choices are not made

wisely, they result in sufferings. Everybody who commits sins thus has to suffer in his own way.

## 10.9 Living and Dying

According to T.N.Madan the attitudes of a people to death and dying should be viewed in their totality, bringing out the inter-connectedness of belief, emotion and behaviour. Death in every religion including Hinduism is regarded as the divine wish. In Kashmir death is considered as the family affair, though it is not necessary that every members of the family if affected equally from it. Pandits in everyday conversation always says that one has to die one day. The pandits of Kashmir maintained that the ultimate and critical sign of a good life may be available in the manner a person attains his death. In other words when one lived his/her life according to the dharmic principles s/he is bound to attain a good death. The good death here means the death at a good place, a good and auspicious time, and the good physical state of the person at the time of his death. The best place to die for a householder is his own house, because as a householder the person performs his dharma/karma in his own house only. The good death is also one where a person dies in a astrologically good time. One should die in full consciousness of the event, with one's mind fixed on the supreme God or the divine spirit. Good death and the last words spoken by those who attain it, are remembered and talked about for edification for years.

### Reflection and Action 10.2

Discuss the notions of living and dying among the Kashmiri Pandits. How are they unique? Write down your observations in your notebook.

A bad death is understood and explained as the result of bad karma of the previous life of the people. The notion of collective death is referred as *Pralaya* but pralaya is a rare event in the life of the pandits. Malefic spirits are held responsible for such type of occurrences. This is also attributed as the decline of dharma in the society. The rearrangement of the social relations that follows a death is different for men and women. A widow has to lead a life of a sufferer, and the man can remarry, widowers suffer from, none of the ritual and social disabilities that widows do, on the other hand a man has to hide his emotional feelings at the death of his wife, and if he expresses his sorrow openly he will be ridiculed, but the women have to display every kind of grief and sorrow.

Killing of any kind is completely prohibited in the pandits' society. Argument is that as nobody can create anything or the birth is given by God and he only can take it back. The killing of Brahmin is the most heinous crime and is called as *brahmahatya*, and it is equivalent to the killing of a cow.

There are lots of rituals involved after the death. The rituals are also prescribed for them at the time of death. The last moments of a pandit's life are accompanied by the reading of the Bhagwad Gita, which describes the imperishability of the soul. If water from the river Ganga is available, a few drops are poured into the mouth of the dying person. As soon as the death occurs, the event of the death is made public through loud weeping and wailing by women and the children. The weeping at the death is a kind of special one, though the weeping by the women in other occasions also happens. At this point of time the neighbours and kiths and kins assemble in the deads man's house. The visitors then try to control the mourners and arrange for cremation of the dead and they also arrange

for the feeding of the family, because no food is cooked in the deceased family for three to twenty days.

After the weeping, the body of the dead man is taken for the ritual bath with the recitation of the mantras by the priest. Then the body is taken for the burning process. In fact cremation offers the opportunity for release from transmigration. After the cremation the dead man is considered to live in the state of transition i.e., he is in the state of *preta* (ghost) for eleven days. During this time the various rituals are performed and food offerings are made to sustain the *preta*, for it is very dangerous. The rituals of the eleventh day is considered that the *preta* entered or transformed into the category of *pitr* (manes), therefore, it is a biannual affair to offer food to the dead on the death anniversary.

The post cremation rites are very complex as not everybody is entitled to get the status of the *mane*. If a person dies before becoming a parent s/he not given the status of the *pitr*. Thus, in the relationship between the living and the dead, the notions of *pitr* and *punarjanma* (rebirth) negate the notion of death as the terminal event. On the other hand a good life and a good death frees oneself from the chain of birth-death-rebirth. Death is thus made bearable in the life of a pandit culture by it being treated as an opportunity for the individual soul to realise union with that from which it had got separated i.e., *kaivalyam*. Thus, it is the help of various rituals through which a pandit is able to cope with the stress of the death. They conceptualise their death as something necessary for the fulfilment of the life cycle. Moreover, in pandit society death is not considered as a threat to or a sacrilege against the social order.

## 10.10 Conclusion

In the conceptualisation of Hinduism it is very clear that the Hindus are primarily concerned with the dharma which refers to what people do according to their dharmic doctrine. Madan writes that the distinction between the 'religious' and the 'secular', which is fundamental in western society and in the western thought, is not easily made in Indian society. Such a differentiation, and further elaboration of it (most notably between sacred and profane dichotomy), are a characteristic of the outsider's effort to understand Hindu society and this also entered in the mind of the modern Hindus and modern Indians, who is by definition an alienated person. Thus we can understand the Hindu ethos and culture in its own way and any deviations in interpretations can give an image of a distorted picture of this way of life. Today the challenges that Hinduism faces does not come from an alien religion but from the western ideals of secularism and the concept of western modernisation. Madan considers that the history of Hinduism constitute also the sociology of Hinduism.

From the above discussion it is also clear that the brahminical tradition is more or less similar everywhere i.e., in every part of the country. The notion of *papa* and *punya* is based on the Dharma and its adherence. Another point which is time and again came in the discussion that the life of the householder is of utmost importance and in order to attain renunciation one has to complete the life cycle according to *purusartha*. The Hindu always lives a life of a moral dilemma which is treated since very long in the Hindu literature, the dilemma is between renouncer and the enjoyer, between the self-control and power of enjoyment. For a Hindu thus, the moral awareness is very important and for it one has to lead a good life, the good life here means the consistent effort of self-improvement through attention to the proper dharmic life. The Hindu life tries to overcome the evils of the world, and it teaches not to fear death.

The birth and death are not separate but are recurrent event in a cosmopolitan process. The traditional base of Hinduism is thus interpreted in this work as the view of man-in the world as the good life in contrast with the life of a renouncer.

## 10.11 Further Reading

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R.S. Khare, (1976). *The Hindu Hearth and Home*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.

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## Unit 11

# Sudhir Kakar: Shamans, Mystics and Doctors

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### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- describe the concept of healing;
- describe some real life mystics;
- outline tantra and tantric healing; and
- discuss ayurveda and society.

### 11.1 Introduction

Preamble: Cross-cultural studies of mental health were introduced by anthropologists in the middle of the twentieth century after Malinowski did his classic study of testing Freud's hypothesis on the Trobriand Islanders. However, very few psychologists in India actually went to test the psychoanalytical theories in the field and in this Sudhir Kakar is both a pioneer and a recognised scholar. His works have made use of the anthropological techniques of field-work along with the sociological insights of looking into textual traditions and comparative analysis comparing Neo-Freudian theories with non-western, in this case specifically Indian systems of healing.

He follows the post - modern traditions of not privileging western systems of knowledge above all others. Moving away from a positivistic stand he enters into a reflexive analysis where his own status as a western trained Indian psychoanalyst is often foregrounded. This book is both an analytical work as well as a story of Kakar's journey across India meeting healers of various traditions and he is careful to take into account the diversity of Indian life as he journeys from rural to tribal areas and into the modern cities.

The student would be benefited to look at this work as both sociological in content as well as an important methodological statement. The emphasis throughout is to keep ethical comments to a minimum and to privilege each system of knowledge equally. Thus to Kakar there is no essential difference between the tribal shaman and the modern psychiatrist. He is comfortable referring to the *pir baba* as a colleague, a fellow practitioner. This movement away from positivism to an eclectic phenomenological analysis is noteworthy as is the use of subjectivity as a tool of research.

## 11.2 The concept of Healing

The book opens with a dictionary meaning of the concept of healing that is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “to restore (a person etc.) from some evil condition or affection (as sin, grief, disrepair, unwholesomeness, danger, destruction), to save, purify, cleanse, repair, mend” (p.3). In the category of healers is included the *vaidas* of Hindu Ayurveda and Siddha systems and the *hakim* of the Islamic Unani tradition-plus astrologers, *sadhus*, herbalists, diviners, *matas*, *bhagwans* and a host of other practitioners. The concept of healing is thus firmly rooted in a tradition where healing is not a separate medical domain but falls within the mystical-spiritual sphere, a phenomenon not only widespread in India but in many non-western cultures. In fact even within the Judeo-Christian traditions beliefs in spirit possession and demonic invasion of the body were widespread till they were edged out by western systems of medicine and the hegemony of western scientific mode of thinking. In India during the colonial period the faith in western systems of medicine became deep rooted among elite sections many of which would have dismissed the path tread by Kakar as hocus-pocus (Channa 2004). Kakar seeks to reinstate some of these antiquated modes of thought with respect to health and healing and also provide them with respectability within the scientific mode of explanation by drawing parallels between the philosophy and techniques of traditional system and the modern psychoanalytic systems and medicine.

The Hindu system of thinking does not have the same view of the person as the western system of thought, where the person is seen as situated within the present and also viewed as bounded. In Hindu view the self is not situated in the present but linked to the cycle of Karma that stretches over many lives and so does the social order that extends much beyond the present to include both ancestors and the progeny to be. In other words how a person is, in terms of both mental and physical health is conditioned by the past births the Karma of the ancestors and what the person will do will affect the generations to be. The person is thus not to be viewed as an individual as in western society but as Mckim Marriott has put it as a “dividual” composed of many parts. Since each of these parts is derived from various sources past and present therefore, the treatment needs to be holistic, taking care of many dimensions, many of which may have supernatural and mystic origins. Thus health is not a matter of simply what has happened to the body but how the person has derived his/her existence (parentage), how he or she has conducted himself and several other factors like family history, land where born and cultural practices that are observed. In other words healing is a term that needs to be understood much beyond its medical sense and health becomes a concept that encompasses the social, cultural and metaphysical aspects of a person’s life, transcending the mere physical.

Kakar is concurrent in his view with Foucault (1965) who considered mental illness to be historically situated within the cultural definitions of particular times and places. Even anthropologists have for long drawn attention to

the fact that the very definition of madness is a social construct and psychoanalytic concepts vary across cultures finding their validity in the symbolic structures in which they are embedded. Thus a shaman who is highly respected in a tribal society because he has visions, may be treated like a schizophrenic with hallucinatory disorders in a modern culture. In fact in the initial stages many anthropologists and scholars including Freud were convinced that the shamans and mystics in non-western cultures were counterparts of neurotics and psychotics in western cultures. However, later it was realised that these people were quite normal and rational in their day- to- day lives but acted according to certain culturally prescribed scripts. Even the physiological transformations that some of them underwent like becoming oblivious to pain or able to perform extraordinary physical feats were a result of deep psychological conditioning some of which is dealt with by Kakar in this book. In fact he coins a term, "cultural psychology" to discuss the interface of culture and psychology.

He admits to a methodological bias in keeping with the reflexive approach of the book that as an Indian he was convinced that there must be some rationality in the Indian way of thinking. However, he does not fail to add that "A degree of alienation from one's culture, a deep exposure to other world-views and even a temporary period of living 'as others' may indeed be necessary for heightening one's perceptions about the culture and society one is born into"(p.9). In this way he is making insightful comments on what in sociology has long been recognised as the advantages and disadvantages of studying one's own culture and the plus and minus points of subjectivity and objectivity as standpoints of analysis. However, he realises that to make his work theoretically acceptable he cannot move away too much from mainstream theoretical approaches of psychoanalysis and he is aware that "the contradiction in simultaneously pursuing cultural relativity and psychological universalism is evident". But throughout this book this is what he does and now let us go into the case studies and their explanations as given in this work. In each case as we shall see there is an attempt to integrate the healer's method and approach within a framework of universalistic psychological theory.

### 11.3 The Pir of Patteshah Dargah

The Patteshah's dargah, in Delhi, is a small mosque built during the eighteenth century in memory of a sufi saint. The pir who is the object of this case study was at the time he was interviewed and visited by the author, a man of 87 years of age, sitting in a dingy room and having no material possessions worth the name. He subscribed to the ideal that the power that he had to cure people could only be used selflessly. He never demanded any money and since his clientele was of the very poor section of society, rarely got any material returns. However, he had a claim to being special as he was supposed to be born in a miraculous way. Stories of miraculous births have been regarded as claims to special powers in almost all cultures across the world. The descriptions we get of the *pir* does not convey any sense of an extraordinary personality or demeanour that would show that he could impress people by his special personal qualities. A toothless old man in shabby clothes sitting in a dirty unkempt room is what we get to see. Yet the *pir* had a reputation for miraculous cures.

#### Box 11.1: The Pir's Explanation

The explanations given by the *pir* for most ailments was invasion of the body by some being like a *jinn* which has been converted to a *bala*

The *jinn*, to begin with, are internal to the personhood of every one. It is that part of the self that is dark and covert and is killed by the angels at the time of death. If however for some reason the *jinn* is not destroyed it turns into a *bala* and tries to find a host body to invade. In trying to find some common grounds between the psychological and demonological frameworks Kakar is led to observe that the *jinns* belong to that covered part of human nature psychoanalysts call the id. It is amoral and primal to which unconscious and socially stigmatised fantasies and desires can be traced. Thus the *balas* are nothing but certain core fantasies of men and women that provoke strong anxieties in the Indian cultural setting. Here the link between psychological anxieties and culture is clear in that only those things that are culturally forbidden or repressed come out in unconscious fantasies. For example, a core fantasy according to Kakar in the Indian culture is of a female demon personifying forbidden female sexuality that sucks and drains even the most powerful men to death. Thus, we have the story of a wrestler who is killed by a female demon who sucks out his life energy. Thus, a good female in Indian culture is not supposed to be overtly sexual yet men have unconscious desires to possess such a woman. It is this forbidden, desire that takes the form of a *chudail* or female ogre.

There are not one kind of healers even within the traditional system thus the mosque that is home to the *pir* also has other specialists like the *hakim* who sits outside under the shade of a tree. The difference between the *hakim* and the *pir* is that between a technician and a priest. The *hakim* gives medicines and considers all *balas* and supernatural beings to be irrational fantasies.

The major requirements of the traditional forms of healing is that the healer is not simply any person who dispenses medicines but a special person who is different from others not simply by having more knowledge and skills but by being transformed from inside. He is a superior moral and ethical being and his powers are not acquired from outside but come from inside. He possesses what is called *Ilm-ul-ruhani* or soul knowledge. The *pirs* are higher than the *sayanas* who have skill but not the superior soul-force of the sacred specialists. The *pirs* and *babas* do not cure by what knowledge they possess but by acting as a conduit for the divinity and it is the divine force that does the actual healing. Thus to be a *pir* a man must develop certain virtues of character, some one whose inner transformation has made him fit to convey the divine healing touch to the sufferer. It is because of this perception that the *pir* does not demand any money for he perceives the healing to be done by God. If the patient gives anything it is only as an offering to Allah or perhaps as a token to take care of the worldly needs of the *pir*.

However, as an analyst what is of most importance to the author and to the readers is how the cure is actually accomplished, for certainly if so many people persist in coming to a healer there has to be a certain number of satisfied patients.

At one level, mostly unconscious the patient evaluates the healer as to the extent to which the healer conforms to an ideal healer in the patient's mind. Thus even if the *pir* is unkempt, dirty and poor, he may project himself as a person of divinity by these very features. Thus, the patient may evaluate him as being other-worldly, pious and having sacred powers, as having inner powers for the very reason that he does not have any material possessions and overt signs of prosperity. These would make him appear holy and also trustworthy in the eyes of poor people.

Moreover, they come with a heightened expectation of getting cured by the social awareness of other cured patients and also stories and folklore that support the miraculous nature of particular healer. As Kakar puts it "The sharing of the demonological framework by the whole culture, where the patient, his relatives and friends are all united on the etiology of the illness and the means of curing it, certainly makes the process of therapy more efficient" (p42). Thus one may explain an inexplicable cure by the faith of the patient that a cure is forthcoming and the sharing of this view by most significant others in her social universe that creates a positive predisposition to getting cured.

Moreover, on the technical side the healers have positive ways of dealing with the psychological ailments. Thus *pir baba* would ask every patient about their dreams and this would open the way for many unconscious emotions and repressions to surface. Both Hinduism and Islam believe in dream symbolism and the interpretations of the *pir* quite often agreed with that of professional psychotherapists. Even the kind of cures like the giving of holy water for cleansing of the 'insides' agreed with psychoanalytic interpretation of water as a symbolic cleansing agent.

## 11.4 Balaji Temple in Rajasthan

From a mosque in Delhi we now move to a temple in Rajasthan in a small town Bharatpur, where a rather nondescript temple is situated whose claim to fame is however phenomenal as it is believed that the god Balaji or Hanuman who is enshrined therein can cure anything from invasion by *bhuta-preta*, madness, epilepsy and barrenness. The mythology of this temple narrates that Balaji sits here in the lap of his mother Anjana, therefore, evoking maternal images of care and healing. Moreover, Balaji is not alone in his abode, he is joined by two other deities namely, Preta - Raja or Dharma - Raja, the other name for the god of death and Mahakal Bhairava who is an incarnation of Shiva. While mythology attributes healing powers to Balaji, Mahakal Bhairava is in control of the demons and *bhuta-preta* and the god of death presides over them all. It is Dharma Raja that keeps an account of the good and bad deeds and doles out punishment accordingly. It is believed that those who die untimely deaths are converted into *bhuta-preta* and they trouble the living as they themselves are tormented by their unfulfilled desires. However, as we shall see these *bhuta-preta* are nothing but the unfulfilled desires of the living that torment them from the unconscious level of their psyche.

The description given of the temple makes it out to be an unusual place full of patients and their relatives who live on the premises for long periods of time. The most unusual behaviours are ignored and taken for granted. A significant feature is the presence of large number of women mostly young who exhibit signs of hysterical behaviour. It is the women who have been especially selected for analysis as they represent according to the author "accumulated and repressed rage of rural women".

There is the example of the young girl Shakun, nineteen years of age, who came from a small town in Bihar. She had been possessed by a *bhuta* since she was sixteen years of age. The *bhuta* in question was the unsatisfied spirit of her aunt, the wife of her father's elder brother. She had committed suicide after being caught red handed by her husband in a compromising position with an outsider. It was disclosed that this woman in question was of a loose moral character having illicit sexual liaisons frequently but her husband was quite unaware of them till he caught her. The girl Shakun was only three and a half years old at that time. According to her family members she was too young to remember the incident but

it was the unsatisfied *bhuta* of the aunt that invaded her young body when she became sixteen years of age.

### Box 11.2: Aspects of Possession

However, Kakar analyses this case as typical of projection of unconscious and unsatisfied desires of a girl in a conservative society; "Shakun's *bhuta* is, then a figure of her unconscious, an iconic representation (in the form of her aunt) of the girl's own sexual (even homosexual) wishes". According to the analyst at three and a half she was not too young to have any memories of events that must have been very dramatic when that happened. Moreover, as she grew up she must have heard the story repeated many times by members of the family and she must have formed an image of the aunt as representing all that was sinful. When her own body ripened she must have been troubled by the emerging sexuality and the desires that would not go away although in her cultural set up she was made to believe that they were sinful. It would be such tensions in her unconscious mind that became projected on to the image of her aunt and led to her 'possession'.

The case of Asha can be analysed as typical where as an only daughter she had a too close emotional relationship with her father. The father, who was extremely indulgent and loving even to the extent of fondling her till she was quite old, was very strict about her sexuality. She was punished for her attraction towards a boy when fifteen years of age and even later when she fell in love at a later age was forcibly married off to the younger brother of the same man. The situation then became even worse for her as her lover, who then became her brother-in-law refused to give up the relationship and forced his advances on her, increasing her sense of guilt.

According to Kakar Asha's case is typical of the hysterical reaction of women who are torn between love and duty. Such instances were quite common among girls in European bourgeoisie society in the late nineteenth century when Freud was practicing psychoanalysis in Vienna. Thus, the unconscious hostility she may have felt towards her father for aborting her first love affair and in not letting her marry her lover later in life was converted to feelings of guilt as she was not supposed to have such feelings towards a very loving father. They then became demons that tormented her. Her stomach-aches could be attributed to her unfulfilled wish to have a baby. It is significant that they were triggered off when she went to visit her pregnant sister-in-law. The unconscious desire to kill the baby would have been converted to another demon thus transferring the guilt on to it. Thus, it was not her but the demon that wanted to destroy the baby. Even her enormous craving for food is translated in psychoanalysis to unfulfilled desires that when they are not satisfied in the right manner are translated into hunger. Thus, people suffering from depression often tend to put on weight as their desires are translated into desire for food.

The interesting difference between the patients at Balaji temple and the middle class Europeans was that although there was great similarity in the hysterical symptoms, the kind of vivid imagery that the patients brought to their *bhuta* in India is completely missing in the western counterparts. The differences are clearly of culture. The Indians are exposed to vivid visual images of gods, goddesses, demons and many mythological beings ichnographically represented in many ways and forms that are missing in the less colourful world of the Europeans.

Again as in the previous case, culture plays an immense role in the curing process. The collective efforts that go on in the temple, the public declarations or *peshis*, that always take place before a crowd of people, the participation of every one present in whatever is going on lends a validity as well as a sense of reality to the healing process. The patient's expectations are heightened as a large number of people contribute towards its validity. The demons are publicly exposed and there is visible relief of the patients who are thus able to get rid of their hidden desires and feelings in a publicly approved manner.

The nights that are spent on the terraces when meetings go on between patients and their relatives with each other, where each case is discussed thread bare, compared and also emotional support provided by the people to each other is in itself a part of the healing. The patients get a lot of support from the 'when every one says it will be done it will be done' attitude. Moreover, the complete acceptance given to the phenomenon of *bhuta* and possession gives moral support to the patients who are never made to feel that there is anything wrong with them rather everything is attributed to the demons.

The male patients usually suffer from the apprehensions of taking on responsibilities and a feeling of being alone. They show symptoms of shying away from growing up into responsible adults and may suffer breakdowns when asked to work or after getting married. Kakar sums it up by saying that "whereas powerlessness is the social denominator of female hysteria – the demands of autonomous functioning and anxiety at the prospect of individuation seem to be the social correlates of male hysteria". In India the prospect of separation from the mother also haunts men as the mother son relationship is unusually close.

## 11.5 The Oraons

The Oraons are a tribe in the Chota Nagpur plateau of eastern India. They were a forest dwelling tribe till the deforestation process pushed the forest away from most of their dwellings. Today they practice some rudimentary agriculture that barely suffices for their subsistence needs. However, they still have considerable reverence for nature and every Oraon village has its sacred grove of trees and sacred pools and streams that are intrinsically connected with the deities and the spirits of the ancestors. The Oraon have a free and easy way of life and do not suffer from sexual suppressions and repressions usually found among the Hindus. They have the *dhumkuria*, or youth dormitory that is an important education institution where a boy is sent when he is around 8 years of age and he is given instructions in folklore, dance, music and other tribal traditions till he is old enough to get married and take up adult duties.

### Reflection and Action 11.1

What is the Shaman of the Oraons called. In what does he specialise?  
Discuss and note down.

The shaman is locally known as Ayata or *bhagat* and is a true specialist in that he can distinguish between two kinds of mental illnesses. One is known as *apropi* that is caused by excessive worrying, anxiety or some other physical illness, in short the kind of diagnosis that a medical doctor might do. The other kind is closer to the demonic possession theory and is known as *shaitani* disorders attributed to demonic spirits. The Ayata is also able to recognise ailments that need medical treatment like stomach

worms and ulcers. In that case he advises the patient to get medical help and not waste time and money in demonic cures.

### Box 11.3: Treatment for Possession

The Ayata come close to the psychoanalyst when they locate the origins of envy to early childhood. One may compare their theory to that of Melanie Klein that says the first stir of envy occurs in infants when they become aware of the breast as a source of life and all good experience and feel envious that they are not the source of such perfection. Thus, the wisdom of the tribal shamans parallels that of modern day scientists in many ways.

The treatment for *shaitani* possession is to induce the patient to go into a *trance* from where the shaman is able to converse with the invading spirit. Thereafter once the shaman is convinced about what the demon wants he thinks up ways and means to get rid of it. One way is to lure the demon into a bird (chicken or pigeon) that is well fed and looked after for about six months to ensure that the demon does not leave. Then it is killed and fed to a number of people ensuring its destruction.

Raymond Prince, reviewing a number of studies from different parts of the world has suggested that the altered states of consciousness that occurs in a state of possession when another ego seems to take over may be in itself a therapeutic agent. Thus, during the possession ritual the ego is dissolved and a new, more adoptive ego may emerge. There are here two kinds of overt possessions; one of the shaman which is of a presiding deity and that of the patient, by the demon. It is in the latter's case that ego adjustment takes place for the shaman it a routine matter.

The anxieties from which the tribes suffer are more from factors caused by external agents than their own social norms. Thus deforestation, the erosion of the traditional ways of life, forced changes in their life style and poverty are some of the reasons for depression and neurosis among them. In fact their free and easy life style is the object of covert envy by their Hindu neighbours.

## 11.6 The Lamas of Macleodganj

The lamas are Buddhists unlike the Hindus and Animists we have discussed so far. Yet they too practice shamanism like the tribes and believe in possession rituals. These lamas came with the Dalai Lama when he fled from Tibet and took shelter in Dharamshala. Since then they are having a considerable influence among the local population irrespective of them being Buddhists or Hindus or Animists. There are three kinds of practitioners among the lamas, the mystics, the doctors who practice the ancient art of Tibetan medicines and the shamans who enter into possessions.

The Tibetan view however, is different from the view of demonic possession of the Hindus. To the Buddhists all existence is a mirage of the mind and the absolute reality can be attained only when the cobwebs covering this reality, that we assume is the real world but which is actually *maya*, is cleared. Within this world-view, both physical and mental illness is caused by a fault of the mind, a distortion of perception. A thorough cleaning of the mental and emotional world is necessary for the cure of every type of illness. However, in their actual practice of illness the lamas are confronted with patients who would want instant cure and would not be comforted if

told that this was all illusionary. So a healer identifies mainly four immediate causes for any illness, the time of the year, food, habit and behaviour and the three hundred and sixty spirits that crowd the environment. The Tibetan system makes no essential causative difference between mental and physical diseases that are traced to the same origins. Diagnosis usually involves dream analysis, a method popular across most cultures. Other symptoms like a patient's eye movements are also helpful in diagnosing the exact spirit that is invading. However, not all symptoms are traced to spirit invasion and emotional disturbance, grief etc. are also seen as causative of mental disturbances as in modern systems of medicines. Bad times, ill karma and simply bad luck may also be the reasons for ill health and cures vary from changing a person's name to hanging of prayer flags.

Levi-Strauss, the famous anthropologist, has suggested that there is a parallel between the cure brought about by the shaman and that affected by the psychoanalyst. In the case of psycho-therapy the patient is healed by regaining his/her individual myth, related to life history, for example, resolution of the oedipal complex. In case of shamanism the cure is related to the social myth, like that of existence of *bhuta*. However, as Kakar points out even in case of shamanism a successful shamanic ritual is not merely the healing operation of a collective myth subscribed to by the community but also attends to the individual elements of the patient's sickness. For example, the collective may draw upon the concept of Karma but its individual manifestations are rooted in an individual's life history. Moreover, the shaman may draw upon the most frequently occurring mishaps in a culture, often that are a result of culturally imposed inhibitions and restrictions, like on women's sexuality among upper caste Hindus and Muslims, to create collective myths. Thus the separation between the social and the individual is only a matter of degree for individuals live in society and are guided and restricted by its norms.

## 11.7 Mystical Traditions: The Sant Mat of the Radhaswami Satsang

Radhaswami satsang of the Beas group is an extremely popular movement in northern India and is based upon the *guru shishya* tradition and the need for a living guru to lead one to salvation. The Radhaswami world-view tells that the path to salvation lies in *surat shabd yoga* where one is linked to the celestial sound emanating from the highest region of creation, the abode of the Supreme being.

The Radhaswami satsang makes the most of the notion of the collective in creating an atmosphere of catharsis as thousands of followers sit in unison and chant in the praise of their guru. Kakar, who is a participant observer in the true sense of the word writes. "To anyone sitting within the vast belly of the crowd, a choir of fifty thousand feels like an elemental sound of nature —. Here I am deliberately emphasizing my subjective experience of the Satsang, on this day as on the following days and the fantasies that bubble up to the fore of consciousness as one sits esconced in the warmth closeness of thousands of bodies"— further "Distance and differences — of status, age and sex-disappear in an exhilarating feeling (temporary to be sure) that individual boundaries can indeed be transcended and were perhaps illusory in the first place".

However, the author does not think it fit to refer to the *satsangs* as a society or as a community, he prefers to say that they seemed to be living in a communion, referring perhaps to the temporary and situation nature of the brotherhood and communication between the believers.

How does healing take place in such a situation? Taking the example of a young man who saw the face of the *baba* in his dream and came looking for him it can be said that this vision of an old bearded man (that is how the *baba* looks) may be linked to the search for and yearning for a father figure at the time of deep personal crises. A Jungian analysis may look for the archetypical vision of the 'Old wise Man' as drawn from the collective unconscious. As a part of therapy the *sasangis* tried more and more to identify with the guru and in the process to forcefully project all positive qualities that lay within them. Thus, in psychoanalytic terms one may look for an explanation in the process of idealisation and identification. Thus, as each follower strives to follow the path of *sadhna* laid down by the guru and which involves many acts of self-purification like giving up eating of non-vegetarian food, consumption of alcohol, telling lies etc. he or she comes closer to this identification as the guru is upheld as the perfect state to be in. As people progress further and further in the path of *sadhna* the guru, Maharaj ji becomes the fount of omniscience and omnipotence and the supposed power of the guru is absorbed into one's self. It is this sense of power and internal purification that comes with greater and greater identification that leads to healing of the inner self.

## 11.8 Tantra and Tantric Healing

Tantric practices are part of Hinduism yet they are regarded not quite in the line of conservative Hindu thinking, in fact they go against most of the moral values and beliefs of what is regarded as mainstream Hindu traditions. Even geographically speaking Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Kashmir, where Tantric practices and cults were historically located are socially and politically on the boundaries of mainstream Hindu society.

Because it deals with the forbidden things, Tantrism is closest to a psychoanalyst. There is similarity in the manner in which both look at the emancipation of the self. In the case of psychoanalysis, healing involves the "enlightenment" that is not only individual but also societal in nature in that the person must be acceptable to society in order to be considered, 'normal' and in case of Tantra, a 'liberation' not only in the mystical sense but one that is emancipative even in the context of one's life history and situation. Both psychoanalysis and Tantrism look upon healing involving a recognition and even celebration of human sensual nature.

In fact Tantra concurs with psychoanalysis in its diagnosis of human mental diseases. Leaving aside the experience of birth of which we have very little knowledge, most of the psychic pain experienced by the ego on its path towards development are of separation and differentiation. The very process of realisation by the infant that it is separate from its mother, especially from her breast is a painful process and so is its realisation of gender. To begin with infants have no notion of being differentiated but once they realise that they can only be one, that is either male or female, another kind of pain takes over. Freud has discussed these aspects in great details in his theories of the development of the ego when the infant Narcissus painfully separates a 'me' from a 'non-me' in the "prehistoric phase" of human psyche that extends from birth to three years of age.

### Box 11.4: Tantra and Psychoanalysis

Just like psychoanalysis that roots much of mental problems to the unconscious trauma of assuming a gendered identity, Tantra too looks upon sexual differences as a major problem of human life. Tantra

claims that wholeness and spiritual liberation can only be achieved if a person gives up his/her gender identity and dissolves his/her self into an undifferentiated bisexuality. Unlike other belief systems Tantra refers to sexuality on both symbolic and concrete physical ways. For the male Tantric a major part of his spiritual experience is to apprehend and experience the feminine sexual experience within himself and the reverse is required of the female Tantric. Tantrism is in essence free of gender bias and regards man and women equally. In essence it invokes the breaking of all taboos, thus sexual experience with one's mother, sister and daughter is one of the highest attainments of spiritual liberation. In actuality most schools of Tantra requires the Tantric to perform all his sexual practices with his wife and the images of the mother, sister and daughter are invoked in the wife herself. Thus Kakar analyses this " As post -Freudians, we know the child's unconscious incestuous fantasies, consequent to the momentous discovery of gender identity, provokes major anxieties which the child's immature ego copes with by building defensive structures in the psyche. Tantric practice not unlike psychoanalysis, seeks to resurrect the elemental fantasies around incest" (p.159). Not only Freud but Jung too would have been at home with Tantric practices as according to Jungian analysis one might say that Tantric practices bring to a conscious level the "inherited collective image of the Woman which exists in every man's unconscious and through which he 'knows' women".

A Freudian analysis is aptly suitable for Tantrism for such an analysis would be sensitive to the developmental aspects of bisexuality and its cultural variations. However, Kakar does not believe that one should either go for psychological reductionism or for thorough going cultural relativism, but should take a middle path testing the psychological theories in a cross cultural framework.

According to Stoller (1968) masculinity in men is not a naturally occurring state and some rudiment of femininity is there from the beginning as a result of the primary identification with the mother that is common to all infants. Only in the developmental process the realisation comes that one is only of one sex and this remains as a primary anxiety due to differentiation. However, the process of differentiation takes different forms in various cultures and in India the mother son bond is especially long and enduring as well as among the most intense known in any culture. This memory remains latent in the unconscious mind of the Indian man and influences adult personality. However, in those men where the early experience with the mother is of hostility it comes out as aggression towards women in later life and masculinity is not tempered by any feminine qualities of nurturance. The ideal Indian man is however, not devoid of nurturing qualities and as we had seen in the temple of Balaji, the myth situates Balaji in the lap of his mother. Bisexuality is found in many Indian myths such as that of Shiva as *ardhanarishwar* and of Vishnu taking on the garb of a woman; holy men such as Rama Krishna Paramhansa often manifest the feminine qualities.

Apart from psychological anxieties that are resolved perhaps by the Tantric rites themselves, overtly the system also has an explanation for ill-health. The Tantric view of the body divides it into *chakras* that are situated from the base of the spine to the top of the head. The life energy (*kundalini*) rises from the base to the top of the head as the person reaches enlightenment. Ill health is attributed to the disturbances in the *chakras*. And why such disturbances are created? They are created because of undigested Karmas. In the Hindu metaphysics especially in Tantrism,

there is no concept of good and bad but by undigested is meant those Karmas that are not befitting to the lifestyle or situation of a person. When the disturbances become too pronounced a *bhuta* is generated. Thus like psychoanalysis Tantrism also believes that the *bhuta* or demons are produced inside us and are not invasions from outside. Thus the demons within us are the uncontrolled instincts. The Indian *bhuta* can be both good (obedient) or evil (disobedient). Thus, there are four steps to becoming ill. The first is undigested karma that leads to *chakra* malfunctioning, that when intense generates *bhuta* that lead ultimately to mental illness. A Tantric healer must "know" the *chakras*, especially his own and also be a master of demonology or *bhuta-vidya*. Thus we see that to become a Tantric one must successfully overcome one's own unconscious anxieties that can be attained by the practices prescribed. Only thereafter a person gains qualification to get rid of the anxieties, manifested as *bhuta* of the mentally ill.

As an example of a practicing Tantric although of a variety quite different from what is normally regarded as one, Kakar takes the example of Nirmala Devi, famed to be able raise the *kundalini* in no time at all.

### 11.9 The Cult of Mataji: Nirmala Devi

Mataji can only be understood as against her background, that of a former medical student and also belonging to a Christian family. Although she believes in the basic tenets of Tantrism, namely, the *kundalini* and the *chakras*, she is critical of the practices of the Tantrics that are sinful according to her Christian upbringing. She combines Hatha -yoga and Tantrism to practice healing.

Here one must again go back to the question of privileging a particular point of view over others. In the Indian system the correctness of something is judged not by any external system of providing proof but by the inner experiential reality of any one who has attained a degree of self-realisation to perceive the truth.

The followers of the guru or Mata or whatever else the realised person is known as accept the truth because the person, the teacher or master in front of them tells them it is true. No other proof except tradition and the word of the teacher is required. Thus, the weight of tradition, of the 'inner vision' is acceptable over and above the requirement of empirical proof.

#### Reflection and Action 11.2

How is Mataji different from an Oraon Priest. Give reasons for your answer and put it in your notebook.

Thus, when Mataji preaches her version of the human existence to her disciples it is taken as the truth unquestioningly. The imagery of the physiology of the human body locates the psychic energies at various parts of the body, the bulk of it at the base of the spine, the *sushumna*. The human infant that is born of the universal consciousness is cut off at birth from the source by the severance of the umbilical cord. The naval then separates the individual consciousness from its universal roots. It is thus a very important center in Hindu vision of the body. The ego and the super ego are located at the right and the left side of the brain and as they develop during the lifetime of the individual, the consciousness is cut off from the super consciousness. In other words as one develops the

sense of "I", one is moving away from the source of consciousness. Liberation would mean a realisation of the link to the super consciousness and a movement back to it. The left side or the super-ego is home to the demons, emotions, passions and the right side, the ego, is thinking, planning, organising etc. (Here one must remember that Mataji's version of the ego and super ego are quite different from the psychoanalytic concepts). In most people the psychic energies oscillate between the left and the right side. Ideally they should settle down in the middle, at the center of the forehead, where they bring peace and tranquility. There movement die this or that side provokes the energies characteristic of that side. Thus, too much swing to the left side brings bout mental illness. Healing consists of balancing and cleaning of the channels and the removal of the constrictions that affect the *chakras* is the first step towards getting well. Ultimately self-realisation of the movement upwards of the *sushumna* to the top of the head, brings healing.

Any one who has become Mataji's follower and has received self-realisation is simultaneously credited with the potential of becoming a healer. The person who becomes a true follower develops an ability to sense the vibrations emanating from others as well as the status of their charkas and channels. From the point of view of modern medicine the healer's use of his own emotional reactions to the patient as a means of diagnosis is not completely ruled out, for one does hear of intuitive reactions of doctors to the status the patient's health.

However, it is still left for us to understand the basis of the faith and the cures that may actually take place by such methods. What is more important to understand is that even if the cures do not occur the faith is not shaken. Thus, as Paul Watzlawick and Leon Festiner among others have pointed out, once a tentative explanation has taken hold of our mind it is difficult to dislodge it. Even if we receive information to the contrary what happens is that further explanations are built up to save the earlier information. Thus, the explanation itself can not be dislodged or refuted and on the contrary there is distortion of reality to fit the explanation as to give up what we hold dear and may have been acquired ate considerable emotional expense might prove too traumatic.

Thus, the belief in the powers of a Mata, or a guru may itself have considerable therapeutic power and the followers make such heavy emotional investments that they would rather close their eyes to reality than give up the comfort of believing. And quite often it is this trust and faith that actually may bring about a cure.

Thus, in psychological terms the healing power lies primarily in the patient's mind. Thus, as Kakar explains, the miracle lies in the power of the mind to influence the physiological processes of the body. Thus at the time of possession, people can do miraculous feats that they would never in normal times even think of. It is very difficult to explain why hot iron does not burn or piercing the flesh does not produce pain or bleeding.

The faith cures can also be explained in psychoanalytic terms as the "rebirth" of the patient through the various rituals where at the same time he is giving birth to a new set of parents, the guru. Thus, this new parent, mother or father will heal the wounds inflicted by the original parents and "free him from the burden of his life history".

## 11.10 Indian Medicine: Ayurveda

Like Hinduism, Ayurveda is believed to be something that has always existed, having no beginning or end and springing from the laws of nature

itself. The concept of the person in Ayurveda is a holistic one where physical, psychological, social and metaphysical aspects are all given equal importance in defining what a person is. Thus the person is seen as a microcosm of the entire cosmos. All that exists outside in the universe, is contained within the person. This is reflected in the Pancha-Bhuta theory where a person is composed of the five elements, fire, water, earth, air and *akash* (ether). In the same theory it is believed that to have good health there must be balance between the three humors, wind, bile and phlegm. In other words there is an appropriate sense of harmony between the body and the universe and all the elements that compose it for the body is not seen as separate but as continuous with the nature, the universe and the divinity.

Thus ill health is viewed as a range of "cultural diseases" where a person falls ill because of his conviction that he has lost too much of a body fluid, leading to an imbalance in the body. Thus any disturbance in the balance of the humors would manifest itself in causing both physiological and mental ill health. In this way Ayurveda too makes little difference in the causation of illnesses, treating mind and body as equivalent.

Thus according to the Guruji, taken as case study by Kakar for his study of Ayurveda, the struggle against disease is a moral struggle, not only against illness but also against all those who cause this imbalance to occur.

In his observances of treatment done by the Guruji, Kakar observed that he considered himself solely responsible for the patient and not for his family members or any else. And here Guruji follows the tradition set by Freud, in that he too considered himself as solely devoted to the treatment of his patient and having no obligation either to the family or society at large.

Since Ayurveda is concerned with balance, food is very important factor of both diagnosing of disease and of its cure; for a person is what she eats. Psychoanalytically this heightened concern with eating and defeating points to a cultural prominence of "oral fantasy".

## 11.11 Conclusion

In this book the author has journeyed through a very wide range of healing practices available in India focusing on both the key practitioners and the philosophy regarding the causation and prognosis of ill health. A very important theoretical assumption that underlies the entire work and which is very relevant for the student to understand is the way in which cross cultural healing practices have been approached. For many practitioners of medicine as well as qualified psychoanalysts, the truth has always been ascertained and reachable only by the methodology and paradigms of western science. What ever lies beyond has been condemned as superstition or plain deception. This book has been written to specifically counter the condemnation of the mystical world on "social and historical grounds" and the ethnocentrism and sense of superiority of the west.

Kakar specifically puts forward his views on knowledge and recognises that there are four levels of knowledge; commonsense, rational knowledge of the scientist, the imaginative knowledge of the artist and the spiritual knowledge of the mystic. All four have their relevance and none is to be discounted.

Healing of a psychological kind has to do a lot with what both spirituality and psychoanalysis recognise as liberation of the mind to a pure and

balanced state. In traditional Hinduism this liberation is seen as primarily an inner state of mind. It involves the increase in the capacity to experience different inner states but the outer practices are limited and follow traditional stereotypical behaviour. Thus liberation is strictly of an other-worldly kind while this-worldly affairs remain confined within a more or less static model of behaviour.

The west believes that the inner consciousness defined in terms of a rational, waking sense of self, remains constant. Liberation is to be achieved by increasing the potential to act in the outer world and by increasing choices. Expansions of the inner realm are dismissed as irrational and even a sign of mental illness. One may recall for example that non-western shamans and mystics had often been designated as neurotics or psychotics by western thinkers.

Healing in India is also seen as something that belongs to the collective and not to the individual. In India the patients are always surrounded by relatives and well-wishers and this is seen as part of a therapeutic process. Under the western system of medicine such collectives are viewed as an intrusion into the privacy of the patient and as something that may be actually detrimental to the patient's health. But as Kakar has shown in the case of the Balaji temple, collective action actually informs the patient that he/she is part of a larger whole and the problems are not only his/hers but are shared by the larger group. Active communication between patient's and the relatives, the cultural support given to such beliefs as spirit possession go a long way towards providing an appositive frame of mind and a feeling of being absolved of guilt that restores the ego to a more adaptive stage.

Social support and cultural translation of diseases within an acceptable framework provide real therapeutic support and in many cases the patient is restored to a normal life. For example if the patient believes that his/her condition is not as a result of anything wrong with his/her physiology but only because of illegal possession by an evil spirit, then the anxieties are displaced on to this negative figure and when it is believed that this spirit has left the body, the patient believes and is actually restored to mental health by this belief that the negative forces have left. Many times the negative figures are culturally negative too, for example, the *bhuta* are often believed to be that of muslims, therefore, the irrational fantasies and urges are not that of the patient but of this culturally negative category of person. The psychoanalytic concept of displacement is supported and made effective by social and cultural means.

Thus society and culture provide what even in western system can be defined as a sign of mental health, namely a balance between inner needs and the outer reality. Since needs are defined in cultural terms most normal individuals are brought up or socialised to be fit members of their own society. However, under special life historical situations the persons may not be able to cope with the tensions between their inner sub-conscious urges and the demand of society. Sometimes the social demands may go beyond human levels of tolerance as is often seen in the case of women in conservative societies. Here the cultural mechanism comes in to provide an outlet. Thus, possession by a *bhuta* enables the patient to give vent to those inner feelings that can never be expressed by her in normal life; thus, an otherwise demure woman may speak in filthy language and abuse her husband or even engage in overt sexual behaviour, thus providing cathartic relief to the ego, but at the same time is culturally absolved of all the consequences of her action as these are attributed not to her but to the invading demon.

Thus society and culture play important role in healing and mental health and this has been recognised under the concept of cultural psychology of which this book provides a very good analysis.

## 11.12 Further Reading

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## Unit 12

# Peter Berger: Phenomenology of Religion

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### Contents

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 The Theoretical Framework
- 12.3 World Construction
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- 12.5 Existing Perspectives on Religion
- 12.6 The Concept of Religion
- 12.7 Secularization
- 12.8 The Future of Religion
- 12.9 Conclusion
- 12.10 Further Reading

### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- introduce Berger's theoretical framework;
- explain religion and world construction;
- outline existing perspectives in religion;
- describe secularization; and
- outline the future of religion.

## 12.1 Introduction

During the years of the Second World War, the authors we read the most on the sociology of religion were Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Émile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel. Although they are still popular and read, the latter half of the twentieth-century brought to the fore some other authors whose work on the sociology of religion made a breakthrough. Among them are Talcott Parsons, David Martin, Robert Wuthnow, Robert Bellah, and of course, Peter Berger. In their respective writings, these authors have continued to combine a high-level of theorizing with close attention paid to empirical reality. But, of them, it is Berger who is believed to have contributed the most to the study of religion.

## 12.2 The Theoretical Framework

The basic aspects of Berger's theoretical framework were laid down in his book titled *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), which he wrote jointly with Thomas Luckmann. This book dealt with the sociology of knowledge, exploring the relationship between conviction, commitment, and social reality. How and why are people convinced by certain phenomena and beliefs? Why do they remain committed to them, even when certain groups of people or individuals may express serious doubts about their credibility and veracity? And, how convictions and commitments shape their view of social reality? The arguments that developed in this joint

publication, which was rather general in orientation than concerned with any specific institution, were applied to the realm of religion in his *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), which was later published (in 1969) under the title *The Social Reality of Religion*.

Berger used this theoretical framework in a number of his subsequent works; for instance, in understanding the 'modern condition' (in his books *The Homeless Mind*, 1973; and *Facing up to Modernity*, 1979), the dynamics of family (in *The War over the Family*, 1983); and to the issues of economy and development (in *Pyramids of Sacrifice*, 1974; and *The Capitalist Revolution*, 1987). But, religion (and its modern forms) has been one of Berger's life-time commitments, and it is for his academic as well as popular writings on religion that he is internationally known. His initial focus was on the fate of religion (particularly Christianity) in America and Europe (in his books, both published in 1961, *The Precarious Vision: A Sociologist looks at Social Fictions and the Christian Faith*; and *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment*). Later, he broadened his scope of enquiry to include the spread of Islam and Charismatic Christianity. Interestingly, his books - particularly *A Rumour of Angels*, 1969; *The Heretical Imperative*, 1979; and *Redeeming Laughter*, 1997 - have exercised a profound influence within the churches, and are frequently cited. The appeal of his writings to a wide audience seems to lie in his starting point, which is empirical, beginning with everyday life experiences, and also the clarity of his prose. Moreover, in his role as Director of the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture (in Boston), a position he has held since 1985, he has been able to further his academic interests and test his ideas by advising researchers to undertake fieldwork in different parts of the world.

### 12.3 World-Construction

Berger's work on religion begins with locating its place in the enterprise of world-building. Every human society is concerned with the task of constructing a world around it - understanding the meaning of various phenomena, drawing relationships between them, formulating the theories of causality, endeavouring to control or supplicate the natural forces. Whatever and whichever world human beings construct has no other existence except what they collectively give it. Berger (1967:13) writes:

Society is a product of man. It has no other being except that which is bestowed upon it by human activity and consciousness. There can be no social reality apart from man.

Moving further, Berger pays considerable attention to understanding the relationship between human beings and society, which he finds dialectical, in the sense that 'society is the product of man and man is the product of society.' Man creates society, and in turn his 'product' defines, influences, and shapes him. His identity is known through society. His existence outside (or without) society is unthinkable. Society was there before he was born and it will continue to exist after his demise. And, at the same time, society does not change on its own terms; it is man who brings about changes in society, thereby modifying, perfecting, and making it more livable and meaningful. Berger's submission here is that no social reality can be comprehended empirically apart from the dialectic of man and society, including the phenomenon of religion.

The dialectic of 'man in society' and 'society in man' consists of, Berger says, three processes, which he calls 'moments or steps' (1967:14), namely externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Externalization is the 'ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical

and the mental activity of men' (1967:14). In simple words, it means that 'man, the biological organism' becomes 'man, the social being' by ceaselessly interacting with the 'extra-organismic' or 'extra-somatic' environment, which consists of both the physical and the human world (society and culture). Objectivation takes place when the products of human physical and mental activities attain a reality of their own that confronts its creators as a 'facticity' (or 'factuality') outside themselves. This would instantly bring to our mind the writings of the German scholars, Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx, the authors who pioneered the concept of alienation.

#### Box 12.1 Internalization

The last process in Berger's scheme is internalization, which occurs when the 'objectivized reality' - the products of human physical and mental activities which stand outside human beings - are subjectively appropriated by them. Thus, the 'structures of the objective world' are transformed into 'structures of the subjective world'. In this scheme, society is created through externalization. It is through the process of objectivation that society becomes a reality *sui generic*, having its own laws and identity. And, through internalization the 'society-creating human agents' become the 'products of society'.

These processes create the world, objectively as well as subjectively. But how do individual human beings learn about the world and behave? Here, for Berger, the process of crucial significance is socialization, which is defined as the process by which society transmits its objectivized systems of knowledge (customs, values, norms) from one generation to the next. Through this process of learning, individuals imbibe the objectivized cultural meanings of a society, and come to identify with these meanings. Berger (1967: 33) says that it is through socialization that the 'taken-for-granted' quality of the society under consideration is internalized. It is not enough that the individual looks at these meanings as 'useful, desirable, and right'. He is expected to consider them as "inevitable, as part and parcel of the universal 'nature of things'", as what is correct and destined. The individual who internalizes these meanings not only possesses them but also represents and expresses them. The chief cultural meanings of a society (and religion is one of them) can be sustained only if they are internalized by most of the members of that society.

## 12.4 Religion and World-Construction

Berger's concept of religion follows from his understanding of society as a world-building and world-ordering activity. He says that society imposes upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals a meaningful order, for which he uses the term 'nomos'. When we say that society is a world-building enterprise, what we mean is that it is an 'ordering, or nomizing, activity' (1967:28). Berger distinguishes nomos from 'cosmos'; the former refers to the meaningful order that society imposes on its members, whilst the latter means the 'universe', the sphere around men, which is perennially enigmatic to them. All societies are concerned with evolving a relationship between nomos and cosmos.

At this juncture, Berger thinks in terms of a continuum of societies. At one end are those where the socially established nomos has the quality of being undisputed, almost 'taken for granted'. In this case, there occurs a merging between the meanings that the nomos gives and the fundamental meanings that are supposed to be inherent in the cosmos. In these societies, the nomos is regarded as a 'micro-cosmic reflection' of the universe. The fundamental meanings of the cosmos are revealed to people through their

nomos. This state of affairs one finds in simple and traditional societies. Thus, it is unsurprising that, for instance, the king in the traditional Chinese society was believed to have the 'mandate of heaven'. He was the representative of the divine forces on earth.

In complex societies, with the rise of science and technology, and causality of various phenomena being established objectively, there occurs, what Max Weber calls, the 'de-mystification of the universe'. The phenomena that aroused awe and wonderment at one time no more do so. What was a 'mystique' at one time is now very much within the realm of 'scientific thoughts', fully explainable and convincible. But it is not that the entire universe - with all its nuances and oddities - comes within the orbit of the scientific knowledge. In many cases, the stability of the nomos is supposed to derive from 'more powerful sources than the historical efforts of human beings' (Berger 1967: 34). Who and what are these 'powerful sources' that remain scientifically inexplicable and endow stability to society? At this moment, or occasion, Berger thinks, that religion enters into our argument. For Berger, thus, religion has to be seen in the milieu of the relationship between the 'socially constructed order' (i.e., nomos) and the 'fundamental meanings inherent in the universe' (i.e., cosmos).

## 12.5 Existing Perspectives on Religion

Firstly, Berger distinguishes his study of religion, which is within the framework of sociological theory, from the one that theologians undertake. He states clearly that no theological or anti-theological implications are present in his work. Neither is he proving nor disproving the reality of religion. Nor does he feel an intrinsic necessity of sociological theory to engage in a 'dialogue' with theologians, although it is possible that certain sociological perspectives may be 'relevant' to them (1967: 181). The difference between the two enquiries into the phenomena of religion should always be kept in mind: sociological perspectives on religion are empirically founded and tested, and they do not deal with the truth or falsity of religion. Theological enquiries are non-empirical and normative in orientation.

### Action and Reflection 12.1

Point out the relationship between religion and world construction to your friends. Note down their comments in your notebook.

This distinction leads Berger to define religion. He submits that definitions are neither true nor false. They are useful or less so. Each definition of religion has a point to make, has some utility, although it might be based on erroneous assumption. As an example, Berger cites the case of Max Müller's definition, which is: 'religion is a disease of language'. It can be rejected as based on an 'inadequate rationalistic theory of language', but the great service it does is that it tells us that language is a very important component that human beings use in their endeavours of world-building (1967: 177).

Berger is not in agreement with Weber's position that the definition of religion could be postponed till the end of study. This stance or the one of avoiding the definition altogether in a study would make the area of research fuzzy, or one would work with implicit, and not explicit, definition. Weber certainly has an 'implicit' definition of religion, with reference to its 'substance' (or content). But, by contrast to Weber's place, Berger lends support to explication - there must be a properly-framed and thought out definition of any phenomenon under study, notwithstanding its complexity, and religion is no exception.

In comparison to Weber, Berger finds Durkheim's approach to religion 'radically sociological' (1967: 178). To Durkheim's credit are: (1) the definition of religion in terms of sacred things, that is, 'things set apart and forbidden'; (2) the social functionality of religion ('religion binds people in a moral community'); and (3) grasping of religion as a 'social fact', which is to be explained in relationship with the other, preceding, social facts. Berger observes that Weber's 'implicit' definition of religion is substantive in nature. Durkheim also begins with a substantive description of religious phenomena with reference to the dichotomy of sacred and profane, but in the end it becomes a functional definition - religion is what it does, the contribution it makes to the different institutions of society.

Following the tradition of Durkheim, a definition of religion in terms of its social function is in the work of Thomas Luckmann titled *The Invisible Religion* (1967). For him, religion refers to the capacity of human beings to transcend their biological nature by constructing a universe of objective, all-embracing, and morally-binding meanings. As a result, religion becomes not only a social phenomenon (in Durkheim's sense) but also the 'anthropological phenomenon', because it embraces the entire 'non-biological human existence.' Thus, for Luckmann, everything genuinely human is religious, and the non-religious phenomena are those which are grounded in the 'animal nature' of man.

Commenting on these ideas, Berger expresses his disagreement, as we noted earlier, with Weber for not formulating an explicit and operational definition of religion. Although Weber says that the definition would come at the end of his study he was engaged in, he could never reach the end, and so the readers keep waiting for the 'definitional pay-off' (1967: 178). Durkheim was more concerned with the functions of religion, and so the substantive aspects of religion remain rather not so developed. With respect to Luckmann, Berger questions an approach that equates religion with all human activities, with all that is human. Undoubtedly, religion is a 'mode of symbolic self-transcendence', but there are other human activities that have the same quality, yet they are vastly different from religion. For instance, one finds the same quality in modern science, but it would be erroneous to equate it with religion.

Berger looks for a substantive definition of religion, i.e. define religion in terms of its substance, in terms of what it has. He distinguishes it from those approaches that begin with an anthropological foundation of religion - religion is a human characteristic, not found at infra-human level - and also those that look for the functions of religion.

## 12.6 The Concept of Religion

Berger (1967:34) offers a substantive definition of religion by positing the idea of a sacred cosmos:

Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. Put differently, religion is cosmization in a sacred mode.

This definition is derived, Berger says, from the writings of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. Although Berger refers to Durkheim's distinction, he states clearly that the concept of sacred he uses is from the writings of the scholars on religion from the time of Otto. For him, sacred refers to a 'quality of mysterious and awesome power'. It is other than human beings, and at the same time it is related to them. Sacredness resides in the objects of human experience - thus, this quality is attributed to natural phenomena and objects, to human beings, and to things that men have

produced. There are sacred rocks, sacred clothes, sacred times, sacred tools, sacred spaces, and so on.

### Box 12.2 Sacred Objectives

There is a great variety of sacred objects, which differ from one society to another. There are different historical manifestations of the sacred. Furthermore, sacredness is relative: what may be sacred in one setting may not be in the other. But, notwithstanding these cross-cultural differences, all sacred things share certain uniformities. Firstly, sacred is seen as 'sticking out' - as being different - from the normal routines of everyday life. It is conceptualized as 'extraordinary' and 'potentially dangerous'. It can cause harm, but its dangers can be domesticated, through means of ritual supplication or cajoling. Its potency can be harnessed to serve the needs of human life. Sacred is apprehended as a quality different from human beings, but it relates to them in a way in which no other thing does. People confront sacred as an immensely powerful reality other than themselves, which helps their everyday living, at the same time locating their life in a meaningful order.

Like Durkheim, Berger also thinks that the 'dichotomization of reality into sacred and profane spheres, however related, is intrinsic to religious enterprise' (1967: 35-6). The category of profane is negatively defined: it is the 'antonym to sacred' or the 'absence of sacred status'. The idea of 'left-over' may also be noted in the definition of profane: what is not sacred (or 'sticking out' of the normal) is profane. For Durkheim, it may be noted, the activities of everyday, mundane, life constitute the domain of profane, but they can become sacred if they come to be infused with extraordinary powers. The opposite is also true: the sacred objects may lose their power and become commonplace. For Durkheim, sacredness is superimposed on objects, an activity that *conscience collective* (collective consciousness) has carried out historically.

In addition to the dichotomy of sacred and profane, Berger also formulates another dichotomy of sacred and chaos. The sacred emerges out of the chaos, and then confronts it as its opposite, its antithesis. This idea emerges from a reading of a number of myths of human and nature creation. There was utter chaos in the universe before god brought everything under his control, created man and woman, handed over to them the repository of sacred knowledge, and blessed them to lead a happy life for themselves and their posterity forever, provided they followed the divine commandments. If they failed to subscribe to sacred knowledge, they would fall into chaos, and that would be their end. Religion teaches people that there are 'dangerous' powers inherent in sacred objects, which in case of not being treated properly can always withdraw their support and favour. Losing connections with sacred would mean being engulfed by chaos. Religion keeps the terror away. If order is the first (and the foremost) need of human society, the crucial function of religion is its ordering (or 'nomizing') capacity.

## 12.7 Secularization

One of the points that Berger makes is that the cosmos may not always be considered as sacred in some societies. For example, in modern society, there have been attempts to 'secularize' the cosmos, deprive it of its sacredness. Modern science has played a crucial role in this process. However, Berger thinks that originally all cosmic entities (or *cosmoses*) had a sacred character: 'Viewed historically, most of man's worlds have been sacred

'worlds' (1967:37). It seems to Berger that in all likelihood, sacred was the only way by which human beings could have conceived the cosmos.

Until the 1980s, most social scientists thought that the concept of god was becoming increasingly slim in the modern world. Berger was influential in developing what has come to be known as the 'secularization thesis.' He wrote in his *The Social Reality of Religion* (p.130):

Probably for the first time in history, the religious legitimations of the world have lost their plausibility not only for a few intellectuals and other marginal individuals, but for broad masses of entire societies.

In 1974, he repudiated his own thesis. He wrote in his *Religion in a Revolutionary Society* (1974:16) that at one time, he (and many others) had 'overestimated both the degree and irreversibility of secularization.' In 1998, in an article that appeared in *The Christian Century*, he confessed to having made a mistake in his earlier writings that modernity necessarily led to a decline in religion.

To the secularization thesis, Berger has made two important contributions. First, he strengthened Weber's thesis on increased rationalization of the world - the 'world of white fairies' (gods, demons) gave way to the 'world of white coats' (laboratory-men, scientists). Berger, in his work on Israelite prophets, located the seeds of rationality in the monotheism of the Old Testament. In this way, he lent support to the argument held by Weber (and others, such as Troeltsch, Robert Merton, and Martin) that Judaism, Christianity, and Protestantism inadvertently and ironically contributed to their decline. They did this by simplifying the supernatural, by making god a routine and rational entity, and by stating that the operations of the divine were within the limits of predictability. This permitted the growth of rational thinking, science and technology, and also aided the rise of capitalism. It started creating conditions where most people could think of living godlessly.

#### Action and Reflection 12.2

Explain the Secularization thesis to your friends. Ask for their comments and note down your findings in a notebook.

Second, promoting the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, Berger spoke of the impact of the 'pluralization of life-worlds' of people on their belief systems. His thesis was that the rise of pluralism undermines the set of stable beliefs. When a society has multiple beliefs, thoughts and notions, it means that it will not have any set of stable beliefs, since newer and newer 'products of mental work' will keep on surfacing, and also, will become outdated over time. It is a dialectical process. The forces that create plurality go hand-in-hand with that of modernity. Under the combined impact of plurality and modernity, the 'sacred canopy', i.e. the realm of religion, will become a 'less well-established entity, one of precarious existence'. Berger saw an intrinsic link between the processes of modernization and secularization, and what linked them was 'pluralism'.

## 12.8 The Future of Religion

We noted earlier that since 1974, Berger has given a number of reasons for doubting his initial thesis that modernity undermined religion. He has shown that religion has continued to exist as a strong and potent force, gripping peoples' imagination and ways of life, regardless of the rise of modernity, science and technology, capitalism, and rational thinking. He has offered the following reasons to revise his confidence in the secularization thesis:

- 1) There is a growth of conservative and evangelical churches in the United States of America.
- 2) There is a decline of liberal churches.
- 3) There is a persistence of interest in religion (if not church-going) in other Western societies.
- 4) There is a vitality of religion in other parts of the world.

Although Berger was criticized for viewing the world as having a resurgence of religion, he has successfully defended his thesis all these years. The basic debate has been that some have seen a necessary relationship between modernization and secularization - i.e., modernization leads to a decline in the hold of religion on society - whilst others are skeptical of such a link.

Berger focuses attention on the examination of religion in a given context, since what is true of one region may not be true for the other. What is happening to religion in, for example, the Middle East, may not apply to the South Asian societies. Both in the United States and Europe, there is what has come to be known as the 'individualization of religion', which means that the 'rationality of religion' is for the individual, who emerges either as a 'believer' or an 'atheist'. Moreover, religion has lost most of its collective functions. The situation in this part of the world is what Robert Wuthnow calls a 'patchwork religion' or what Danièle Hervieu-Léger has described as *bricolage*, using a term from Claude Lévi-Strauss (c.f. Berger 2001:194), which would roughly mean some of a collage, a coexistence of several things. In this context, the meaning is that there are varieties of religious beliefs and experiences, and a continuum from staunchest and rabid believers to extremely rational and critical non-believers.

However, the difference between the United States and Europe is that the Americans continue to go to church and very often express their traditional beliefs. Almost forty million of them call themselves 'born-again Christians'. One does not come across these things in Europe, but here also, churches continue to play an important role in society, despite the fact that church attendance has reduced and people do not profess their official creed. This is a phenomenon which Grace Davie (2001) calls 'belonging without believing.'

By contrast, rest of the world is, Berger (2001:194) writes, 'full of massive religious explosions.' He has also noted that 'some of the most impressive religious upsurges are occurring in relatively modernized milieus (such as militant Islamism and the remarkable expansion of Pentecostalism)' (2001:194). This should not be interpreted as implying that the phenomenon of secularization does not exist. The point to remember here is that its structure and pattern varies from one part of the world to the other. Incidentally, the version of secularization that exists in Europe is termed Eurosecularity. Berger asserts that we should not assume that secularization wherever it exists is a 'normal concomitant of modernity.' Today, Berger's position is that it is pluralism which is undermining the traditional beliefs and practices. In times to come, religion will continue to have its hold on society, but it will not be one, unified, monolithic religion. Rather, it will be 'religion with pluralism'.

## 12.9 Conclusion

Berger has made a tremendous impact in the sociology of religion. He has contributed to debates in the domains of the sociological nature of religious commitment, religious changes in modern times, the relationship between

religious and economic institutions, secularization thesis and its revision, the Biblical studies, and the interface between theology and sociology. Woodhead (2001) writes that though Berger's career began four decades ago (his first book appeared in 1961), it is now that some of the themes on which he wrote earlier have been taken up into the mainstream of the sociology of religion. An outstanding example is of the concept of de-secularization, on which Berger started writing in 1977, which is now at the centre of the debate whether the world is becoming increasingly 'godless' or 'god-full'. Similarly, Berger has been interested in religion and globalization, a topic that has become popular in the last ten years or so. His concept of the 'pluralization of life-worlds' has also been picked up for further analysis. In fact, some scholars think that it provides a 'new paradigm' for understanding the contemporary world.

## 12.10 Further Reading

- Berger Peter 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin Books. UK  
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## Unit 13

# Clifford Geertz: Cultural Analysis

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### Learning Objectives

After you have read this unit your should able to:

- outline the interpretive approach;
- provide a definition of religion;
- discuss the meaning of symbol; and
- explain faith in religious symbols.

### 13.1 Introduction

Clifford James Geertz is Professor Emeritus of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton (U.S.A.), where he has been on faculty since 1970. He is well known for moving away from the scientific study of social phenomena, as was promoted by Émile Durkheim and later A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, and introducing a more metaphorical and literary style to the field of anthropology. For him, anthropology is a 'literary enterprise', a kind of writing, which shares many similarities with literature, history, and philosophy (Inglis 2000).

### 13.2 The Interpretive Approach

Born in San Francisco (California) on 23 August 1926, Geertz served in the navy from 1943 to 1945, and then studied at Antioch College, where he majored in English, and then studied philosophy. After receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1950, Geertz studied anthropology at Harvard, from where he obtained his doctorate in Human Relations in 1956. From the Massachusetts, he moved to Stanford (1958-9), the University of California (Berkeley), the University of Chicago (1960-70), and then to the Institute of Advanced Study, where he has been ever since, with joint appointments at Oxford University (1978-9) and Princeton University (1975-). An author of twelve books, and the editor and co-editor of numerous others, Geertz has conducted his fieldwork in Java, Bali, Celebes, and Sumatra in Indonesia, as well as in Morocco. In May 2000, he was honoured at a conference held at Sefrou in Morocco, a country where he had done his fieldwork. Geertz found this gesture highly gratifying, for he thought

that 'anthropologists are not always welcomed back to the site of their field studies'.

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Geertz is known for his interpretive approach (or what some call 'symbolic anthropology'), according to which the major task of anthropology is to 'make sense' of cultural systems. He has applied this approach for understanding various aspects of social reality (such as kinship, ideology, modes of livelihood, social change, distribution of power), but he is best known for his focus on the meaning of religious symbols and for his extensive ethnographic studies of religion in complex societies. Among his most significant publications that deal with religion are *The Religion of Java* (1960), *Islam Observed* (1968), *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), and *Local Knowledge* (1983). One of his oft-consulted essays on religion is 'Religion as a Cultural System', which was originally published in 1966 in a volume titled *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* that Michael Banton had edited and was later included in his collection of essays, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

### Criticism of Approaches

Geertz opens his essay 'Religion as a Cultural System' with an observation that the 'anthropological study of religion is in fact in a state of general stagnation'. To explain this, he makes a distinction between the anthropological works on religion that were done before and after the First World War and those that were done after the Second World War. He finds that the former made significant advancement, but the latter were rather sterile. No major theoretical advance has been made in the work produced after the Second World War, except for a repetitious rendering of the ideas of the founders of anthropology and certain empirical enrichments supporting or disputing those ideas. Secondly, this work has always looked at the writings of the scholars from sociology, anthropology, and psychology, particularly the works of Durkheim, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, and Bronislaw Malinowski. None of them has considered the writings from other disciplines like philosophy, history, law, literature, or the so-called 'harder sciences'. In fact, the founders of both sociology and anthropology had closely read these disciplines for ideas and inspiration.

#### Box 13.1 Four Contributions

For a breakthrough of ideas in the study of religion, the point is not that we abandon the thoughts of our founders. Geertz says that four of their contributions have indeed enriched us, viz. Durkheim's distinction between sacred and profane, Weber's method of understanding social action from the point of view of the individual, Freud's parallel between personal rituals and collective ones, and Malinowski's distinction between religion and common sense. But they should be treated as starting points, and we have to go beyond them, placing them in the broader context of contemporary thoughts. At this juncture, Geertz sets out his agenda, choosing the direction in which he would like to contribute to the anthropology of religion.

The path Geertz chooses is to develop the cultural dimension of religious analysis. He thinks that the concept of culture has suffered a great deal because of the multiple meanings it has been given. When it becomes a 'put-it-in-all' concept, an 'umbrella concept', that is everything that human beings have made and thought is 'cultural', its analytical power is weakened. Thus, there is an urgent need to arrive at a definition of culture which is unambiguous and does not have multiple referents. In his essay titled 'Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture', he espouses a view of culture for which he is indebted to Weber. For Weber, man is an

animal who gives meaning to his actions. Man has spun around him the 'webs of significance', in which he is caught, which give him meaning. Culture, for Geertz, refers to these 'webs of significance'. The oft-quoted definition of culture that he has offered reads as follows:

[Culture] denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.

Our job as anthropologists is to discover the meaning of actions of people in different societies. Our approach, Geertz says, is not to discover laws as experimental scientists do, but to 'interpret' human actions, to understand their meaning. In other words, the concept of culture for Geertz is 'essentially semiotic.'

### 13.3 The Definition of Religion

Geertz begins with Durkheim's idea of sacred, which defines religion and sets it apart from other institutions that deal with 'profanity'. The idea of sacred is represented through symbols (material as well as non-material). Religious symbols function to "synthesize a people's ethos" and their world view. In other words, the sacred symbols condition the people's thought, tone and tenor of their life, their moral and aesthetic styles, the way in which they construct and order the universe around them, and the meaning they attribute to their existence. Religious symbols have power derived from some specific metaphysics or philosophy, which also presents to people a specific cosmic (or 'supernatural') order. Religion endeavours to adjust the human actions to the cosmic order and the images of the latter are 'projected onto the plane of human experience.'

That out of their collective imagination human beings have created a cosmic order - sacred and transcendental - which they think constantly influences them is not a new idea. Earlier theories have drawn up a relationship between the cosmic order and human actions. But, Geertz says, this has hardly been investigated from the point of view of how this is actually accomplished. What we know is that it is accomplished in communities annually, weekly, or daily - cosmic order is brought onto the human and the human order is transcended, with people feeling the power of the sacred cosmic order and feeling rejuvenated with new energy and force. The envisaged meaninglessness of life, which may otherwise bother people and make them anxious, is overcome - the cosmic order created with sacred symbols makes the life profoundly meaningful, mirth-giving, and worth-living. Geertz notes that the theoretical framework which would provide an analytical account of the relationship between the cosmic order and human experiences does not as yet exist in sociological studies of religion as they do in other studies, for example, of lineage segmentation, socialization, political succession, etc.

In order to reach such a framework, Geertz attempts a definition of religion. Notwithstanding the idea that definitions establish nothing, Geertz thinks that if they are carefully constructed, they can 'provide a useful orientation, or reorientation, of thought'. They can guide an analytical enquiry with the explicitness they are expected to have. With these introductory remarks, Geertz offers a definition of religion that, as we said previously, is one of the most oft-cited definitions. Religion is, according to Geertz,

- 1) a system of symbols which acts to

- 2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men 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.

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Let us discuss this definition in detail, for it is central to Geertz's understanding of religion.

### 13.4 The Meaning of Symbol

As we see, the first concept to be explicated is that of the symbol. Religion is a system of symbols, but it does not imply that it is the only thing that deals with symbols. For Geertz, it is in fact culture which is a system (or complex) of symbols, and religion being a part of culture is 'symbolic'. But there is a difference between the religious symbols (which are sacred) and the symbols that comprise other realms of society. Like the concept of culture, symbol 'has been used to refer to a great variety of things'. It is a multi-meaning concept. From the forest of different meanings that the term symbol has been given, Geertz identifies the meaning he wishes to adopt for his study.

Symbol is used for any object, act, event, quality, or relation which represents an idea. It acts as a 'vehicle for a conception', which is the meaning of the symbol. The number six is as much a symbol as is the Cross. Symbols are 'tangible formulations of notions'. They are 'abstractions from experiences fixed in tangible forms.' Following Kenneth Burke's example of the difference between 'building a house' and 'drawing up a plan for building a house', Geertz distinguishes the symbolic dimension of social events from empirical totalities. In the examples given above, the former ('building a house') is the empirical totality, whereas the latter ('plan of the house') is the symbolic dimension.

#### Box 13.2 Instinct and Environment

Cultural patterns, Geertz says, are 'extrinsic sources of information', which means that they 'lie outside the boundaries of the individual organism'. Here, Geertz is referring to the same old distinction that anthropologists make between 'what is innate (instinctive) to human beings' and what they 'acquire from their external environment': in other words, culture does not have a bio-genetic base, is learned, shared among people, and transmitted socially from one generation to the next. What is transmitted over generations is the 'symbolic source', for it is in this that the entire knowledge is stored. Culture does not only act as a 'model for' but also 'model of' behaviour. While behaving according to the cultural demands, people also realize the shortcomings, the lacunae, of their culture, which they change. Culture is immensely modifiable.

### 13.5 Religion as a System of Symbols

In his other essay 'Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols', Geertz writes:

It is a cluster of sacred symbols, woven into some sort of ordered whole, which makes up a religious system. For those who are committed to it, such a religious system seems to mediate genuine knowledge, knowledge of the essential conditions in terms of which life must, of necessity, be lived.

Religion provides the blueprint of social existence. In many societies, religious symbols are uncritically held; they are beyond the pale of any skeptical enquiry. Here, Geertz says that those individuals who do not subscribe to the norms that the symbols formulate are regarded as 'stupid, insensitive, unlearned.' Giving an example from Java, where he had done his fieldwork, he says that small children, simpletons, boors, and the immoral people are regarded as 'not yet Javanese', which actually means 'not yet human'. Among them, the same word is used for 'science' and 'religion', which advises them to conduct their social life properly as dictated by the set of norms and values.

Religious symbols are extremely powerful. They inspire in human beings states that transcend them. Geertz gives the example of a Javanese mystic, who stares fixedly into the flame of a lamp, because such a practice instills in him self-discipline and control of emotional expression, which is essential for leading a style of life that is expected of a mystic. Or, to take another example, in a state of overwhelming emotions, a man in distress, cries inconsolably before the idol of a personal guardian spirit, seeking its favour, thinking that the true and candid display of one's mental condition is essential for divine intervention. States of this type induce in the believer or worshipper a certain set of dispositions that shape the quality of his experience. Geertz thinks that religion induces in people two sorts of disposition, respectively called moods and motivations.

Geertz discusses both these concepts. By motivation is meant, in his words, a 'persisting tendency, a chronic inclination to perform certain sorts of acts and experience certain sorts of feeling in certain sorts of situations.' The acts, experiences, and situations are widely heterogeneous as the two examples given above show. Motivations are not acts, i.e. pieces of intentional behaviour; they are also not feelings. They are 'liabilities to perform particular classes of act or have particular classes of feeling.'

#### Action and Reflection 13.1

Describe a religious symbol to your friends and ask them to give examples to elucidate your answer. Put down your findings in a notebook.

Motivations are distinguished from moods. Geertz notes that motivations have 'vectorial qualities', whilst moods are 'scalar'. Motives move in a particular direction, but moods 'go nowhere', they only vary in intensity. For example, the moods that sacred symbols induce, in different situations, range from exultation to melancholy, from a boisterous display of joy to listlessness, from self-confidence to self-pity. Moods result from certain circumstances but they do not respond to any ends. Geertz writes: 'Like fogs, they just settle and lift; like scents, suffuse and evaporate.' Thus, motivations are meaningful with respect to the ends they are supposed to achieve, whereas moods are meaningful with reference to the conditions from which they spring.

## 13.6 Chaos and World View

How do we know that a particular set of symbols happens to be religious, not secular, in nature? It is to be understood in terms of its purported goals. Geertz helps us to understand this with the help of some examples. A particular mood of awe will be interpreted as religious when it is inspired by a conception of an all-pervading supernatural force, rather than a visit to a Great Mall. Similarly, fasting is religious when the idea of a sacred month or day motivates it rather than the perennial desire to shed off excess weight. Religion comes into existence when its symbols formulate

the ideas of order, in fact a transcendental order. To quote Geertz: 'A man can indeed be said to be "religious" about golf, but not merely if he pursues it with passion and plays it on Sundays: he must also see it as symbolic of some transcendent truths.'

Why does the idea of the transcendental truth - morally higher, supreme and superior - come into existence? Why do human beings need the religious symbols at all times and at all places? That religion is a cultural universal is indisputable. The key to this question's answer, Geertz thinks, lies in the observations of S. Langer in his book titled *Philosophy in a New Key*. Langer writes: '[Man] can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with; but he cannot deal with Chaos.' Defining chaos as 'a tumult of events which lack not just interpretation but *interpretability*', Geertz thinks that there are at least three points when human beings encounter such situation, a situation of chaos which brings them to the limits of their powers of endurance and analytical abilities. These three points are of bafflement, suffering, and a sense of difficult ethical paradox, and in case they are not managed, they may lead to a chaos which breaks in upon human beings.

### Religious Paradoxes

Geertz thinks that of the three points that may drive human beings to chaos, it is the issue of bafflement that has been least investigated, with perhaps the sole exception of Sir E.E. Evans-Pritchard's work among the Azande. The truth is that human beings do not wish to leave the situations that cause bafflement unexplained, notwithstanding how simplistic (and overarching) their explanations and clarifications are. In his fieldwork, Geertz found that the Javanese were constantly using their beliefs to explain phenomena, howsoever eerie and strange they might be. By this process they were also convincing themselves that all events and phenomena were 'explainable within the accepted scheme of things', and they should not be left to themselves. Once, in Java, a peculiarly large umbrella-shaped mushroom (what is known as toadstool) grew in the house of a carpenter. Everyone from far and wide came to see it, and each visitor had an explanation for it, irrespective of the 'rightness' or 'suitability' of the explanation. The point is that the toadstool had important implications, for it challenged the people's cognitive ability, their understanding of the world, and people would never like to succumb to these challenges. They would come out with an explanation regardless of its veracity.

The second challenge to the meaningfulness of life is the problem of suffering. It has been investigated more than the issue of bafflement because the two main aspects of tribal religion, which anthropologists have studied in a detailed manner, are illness and mourning, and both of them involve a lot of suffering. The problem of suffering is not concerned with the subject of avoiding it. Paradoxically, it is concerned with 'how to suffer', how to bear physical pain, personal loss, defeats and betrayals, and the agony and pathos of one's nears and dears, without a wince. Suffering is to be 'suffered', so to say, for it is divinely ordained - god loves those who suffer. Suffering is not punitive; it is not a punishment; it is to be interpreted as one's *test* that the divinity periodically conducts. Religion provides people with the method and ideology to bear and withstand sufferings.

The discussion of the problem of suffering leads Geertz to the issue of ethical paradox. If a man is unflinchingly devoted to divine commands and subscribes conscientiously to the righteous way of life, then he should not suffer. Why should god 'subject a man to hell' if he does not deviate from divine instructions? But the truth is that sufferings descend on all, whether

or not they have been adhering to the right path. And, proceeding logically, one would say that it should shake the faith of people in divinity. But that does not happen. Religion renders 'satisfactory' answers to the presence of evil in society. It makes ethical paradoxes meaningful – why the righteous suffer, why simple fellows are deceived, why morally upright people are defamed, why do the honest die in penury, or, in other words, why 'rain falls on the just'?

All the three problems, though different, have a basic similarity. They intend to destroy the purported meaningfulness of the world by showing that there is 'no empirical regularity' (with bafflement all around), 'no emotional form' (with all suffering at one point or the other), and 'no moral coherence' (with ambivalences and paradoxes that evil causes). But what religion does at the face of these problems is to formulate, by means of symbols, the images of a 'genuine order of the world which will account for, and even celebrate, the perceived ambiguities, puzzles, and paradoxes in human experience'. Religion does not deny the presence of equivocalness in human life, but what it denies is that human events are unexplainable, life is unendurable, and justice is nonexistent. Religious symbols assert, time and again, with no grain of doubt that all events, unexceptionally, are explicable; life can be led peacefully in spite of sufferings; and justice never eludes the righteous. Religion both affirms and denies, by submitting that human life cannot escape from pain, ignorance, and injustice, but these states are ephemeral, they are fleeting, like passing whiffs. That they can be eminently transcended is the message of religious symbolism.

### 13.7 Belief and Faith in Religious Symbols

This leads us to a profound question: Why do people believe in religion? Geertz notes that this question is often avoided in anthropology, and is often relegated to a psychological enquiry. People come to believe in religion because of their socialization. Right from the beginning they are told of the moral worthiness and supremacy of certain beliefs, which solve their problems and lay to rest their doubts, and in course of time they are transmitted to the posterity. Underlying all this is the existence of some authority that defines what is 'worshipful' (worthy of faith and worship), and why it should be worshiped. Beneath every system of religious symbolism there is a system of authority which legitimizes and protects it. For example, in tribal religions, authority lies in the traditional imagery; in the mystical ones in the force of the supernatural experience, the experience of one-ness; and in charismatic ones in the attractive hold of an extraordinary person. Even revelations have the immediate authority of the person through whom they are communicated, besides of course the final authority of the divinity which selects a person through whom the 'truth' is revealed. Irrespective of its nature, the authority gives its people what may be called the 'religious perspective'. In other words, one who comes to 'know' must first *believe* in what he comes to know. Religion is 'real for the believers'; for the non-believers (and the faithless), it may be nothing more than mumbo-jumbo, a congregation of irrationalities.

Defining the term 'perspective' as a 'mode of seeing', Geertz states that the 'religious perspective' is one of the several perspectives that human beings have to look at and analyze the world inside and around them. He distinguishes the 'religious perspective' from the common-sensical, the aesthetic, and the scientific perspectives. The religious perspective differs from common sense because it moves 'beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them'. Religion does not act upon the 'wider realities', but accepts them, and develops faith in

them. With respect to the scientific, religious perspective relies upon commitment for wider realities, rather than subjecting them to a dispassionate analysis. And it differs from art because it does not disengage itself from the question of facts as art does, but considers the things - the wider reality - with which it is concerned as 'real', 'factual'.

An important component of religion through which it establishes relations with the wider realities is ritual, which Geertz defines as 'consecrated behaviour'. Through ritual performance, the veracity, the truthfulness, of religious conceptions is reinforced. The idea that religious directions are sound is also generated through rituals. They also produce the moods and motivations to keep religion intact. Here, one may notice that for Geertz also, as it has been for other anthropologists and sociologists, religious symbols comprise the aspects of both beliefs and rituals.

#### Action and Reflection 13.2

Describe a ritual performance of your choice to other students. Ask them whether it is related to religious conceptions of reality.

Individuals believe in the existence of powers beyond them. They have myths, beliefs, stories, fictions about the origin of these powers. They also know that the powers will influence their lives when some form of communication (through rituals) is established with them. But, this does not imply that people live in the world of religious symbols they have created for all of the time. In fact, most men live in it only at moments. The everyday world of common-sense objects and practical acts is the reality of paramount importance for human beings. Against this background, what religious rituals do is to 'colour the individual's conception of the established world of bare fact'. In other words, religion does not describe the world, and if at all it does, it does it obliquely and incompletely. What it actually does is: It *shapes* the world of human beings, giving it a new meaning.

One of the most common occurrences men face is their constant shift from their day-to-day life to the world of ritual performances. When men perform rituals, they are transported to a world that engulfs them almost totally. In this, their beliefs appear 'pale', a 'remembered reflection of that experience'. So, while speaking of beliefs and rituals, we must keep a distinction between them, for their respective individual impacts on people differ greatly. Failure to keep this distinction has led to confusion, leading some to argue about the presence of a 'primitive mentality' and some to say that what science does in some societies is what religion does in some others. Actually, they are talking about different realms of religion, which though related have different implications for the experiences of people.

For the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, religion is viewed as a system of ideas and practices that offers a particular conception of the world that people inhabit. Geertz writes:

Religious concepts spread beyond their specifically metaphysical contexts to provide a framework of general ideas in terms of which a wide range of experience - intellectual, emotional, moral - can be given meaningful form.

From this conception - the world as it emerges culturally - follow the social and psychological aspects of religion. Indubitably, these different aspects are interrelated in practice, but they can be separated for the purpose of analysis, and scholars from different disciplines can pick up different aspects of religion for study.

## 13.8 Conclusion

One of the central points in Geertz's thesis is that religious beliefs do not merely interpret social and psychological processes in cosmic terms, they also shape them. Religions differ in terms of the complexity with which they do it. The complexity of religion is not dependent upon the scale of evolution of a society. It is incorrect to believe that socially differentiated and complex societies have complex religious system; the opposite might be quite true. Geertz submits that the anthropology of religion recommends two operations in its study: first, an analysis of meanings embodied in symbols that constitute the religious system; and second, relating the system of meaning with the other aspects of social structure and psychological processes. Geertz's objection to the contemporary anthropology of religion is not that it is solely concerned with the second aspect - that is, relating religion to the other parts of society, and examining the contribution one part makes to the other - but that it has totally ignored the first - that is, trying to understand the symbolic dimension of religion. His submission is not that what the contemporary anthropologists of religion are doing is wrong, but they are only providing a partial understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, their understanding becomes woefully repetitive because the categories in which they are explained are almost taken-for-granted types, say, for instance, the idea of social integration. So, rites of passage produce solidarity in society in much the same way as does the totemic worship. That is why, Geertz notes at the outset of his study of religion that there is stagnation in the sociological studies of religious phenomena. This stagnation can be overcome by infusing religious studies with a symbolic analysis. Notwithstanding the criticisms of Geertz's approach (see, Asad 1983), his idea that religion is a system of symbols and the job of anthropologists and sociologists is to understand the contextual meaning of these symbols has made a breakthrough in the study of religion.

## 13.9 Further Reading

Clifford Geertz 1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays*. London: Fortana Press

Inglis, Fred. 2000. Clifford Geertz, *Culture, Custom and Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press

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Asad, Talal. 1983. Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz. *Man* (n.s.), 18: 237-59.

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# Unit 14

## Lévi-Strauss': Totemism

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- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Levi-Strauss' Totemism
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### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- describe totemism;
- outline Levi-Strauss' method;
- provide Levi-Strauss' analysis; and
- discuss totemism and classification.

### 14.1 Introduction

Lévi-Strauss is a well-known French anthropologist known for his contribution to the development of structural anthropology, which incidentally also happens to be the title of one of his popular books (of 1969, published in two volumes). Born on 28 November 1908 in Brussels (Belgium) as the son of an artist, he belongs to an intellectual French Jewish family. Lévi-Strauss studied law and philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. However, he did not pursue the study of law and got through the public service examination in 1931 studying philosophy. After that he taught at a secondary school. In 1935, he accepted the offer to be part of a French cultural mission to Brazil. From 1935 to 1939, he taught sociology at the University of São Paulo. During this period, he read the 1920 edition of Robert Lowie's *Primitive Society*, and decided to conduct his first fieldwork in the Mato Grosso and the Amazon Rainforest. First, he studied Guaycuru and the Bororo; and then, several years later, his fieldwork was with the Nambikwara and Tupi-Kawahib. During the Second World War, he spent most of his time in New York. From 1942 to 1945, he taught at the New School of Social Research. Along with intellectuals like Jacques Maritain, Henri Focillon and Roman Jacobson, he founded the École Libre des Hautes Études, a university-in-exile for French academicians. His friendship with Jacobson, who was one of the leading exponents of linguistic structuralism, helped him shape his own anthropological structuralism. In the U.S.A., he also came in touch with the anthropology and field notes (and other materials) of Franz Boas.

### Further Biography

Lévi-Strauss returned to Paris in 1948. He then submitted 'two theses' (one 'minor' and a 'major') for the award of a doctorate from the Sorbonne. They were respectively titled *The Family and Social Life of the Nambikwara Indians* and *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. It was the latter that established him as an important anthropologist, for this book was reviewed favourably in a number of leading journals. In

1950, he occupied the Chair of the Religious Sciences of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, which he re-named 'Comparative Religion of Non-literate Peoples'. In 1959, he assumed the Chair of Social Anthropology at the Collège de France. He established the Laboratory for Social Anthropology (for training students) and a journal, *L'Homme*, for publishing their findings.

Lévi-Strauss was elected to the Académie Française in 1973, which is the highest honour accorded to an intellectual in France. The same year, he also received the Erasmus Award. The Meister-Eckhard Prize for philosophy was conferred upon him in 2003. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and has received several honorary doctorates from universities such as Oxford, Harvard, and Columbia.

For Lévi-Strauss, structuralism implies a search for deep, invisible, and innate structures universal to humankind. These unapparent and hidden structures manifest in surface (and conscious) behaviour that varies from one culture to the other. Conscious structures are a 'misnomer'. Therefore, we have to discover the underlying 'unconscious' structures, and how they are transformed into 'conscious' structures.

In his work on kinship, Lévi-Strauss proposed what has come to be known as the 'alliance theory' ('alliance' is a French word for marriage). It was set against the 'descent theory', which British anthropologists, particularly A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, had put forth. For Lévi-Strauss, incest taboo is the essence of culture. It leads to the formation of relations between groups that exchange spouses (the 'wife-givers' and 'wife-takers'). Lévi-Strauss distinguishes between two kinds of exchange - restricted and generalized. When two groups exchange their spouses over time, it is called restricted, but when more than two groups are related in a cycle of exchange, it is generalized. The implications of both the exchanges in terms of the formation of groups are different.

Lévi-Strauss's seminal work on kinship was succeeded by a widely read account based on his Brazilian fieldwork called *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). Then came two outstanding contributions to the study of classification: *Totemism* (1962) and *The Savage Mind* (1962). After that he devoted himself to the study of myths. Between 1964 and 1970, four volumes of *Mythologiques* appeared, respectively titled *The Raw and the Cooked*, *From Honey to Ashes*, *The Origin of Table Manners*, and *The Naked Man*. In these volumes, he followed a single myth from the tip of South America and followed all its variations from one group to another up through Central America, and eventually into the Arctic Circle. He thus traced the myth's spread from one end of the American continent to the other, and offered its structural analysis.

Lévi-Strauss created a stir in anthropology. Some scholars set aside their own line of enquiry for the time being to experiment with his method, whereas the others reacted more critically to his ideas. But nowhere was his impact total and complete - he could not create an 'academic lineage'. His idea of 'universal structures' of human mind has been labeled by some as his 'cosmic ambition', generalizing about human society as a whole. While British anthropologists (especially Edmund Leach, Rodney Needham) in the 1950s and 1960s were impressed with Lévi-Strauss, they were not in agreement with his abstract search for universal patterns. They tended to apply structuralism at a 'micro' (or 'regional') level. Another example is of the work of Louis Dumont, a student of Marcel Mauss, who in his work *Homo Hierarchicus* (1967) presented a regional-structural understanding of social hierarchy in India. The approach of applying structural methodology at a micro level is known as 'neo-structuralism'.

## 14.2 Lévi-Strauss' *Totemism*

Lévi-Strauss': Totemism

Lévi-Strauss's *Totemism*, as mentioned earlier, was published in French in 1962. A year later came its English translation, done by an Oxford anthropologist, Rodney Needham, and it carried a more than fifty pages of Introduction written by Roger C. Poole. In appreciation of this book, Poole (p. 9) wrote:

In *Totemism* Lévi-Strauss takes up an old and hoary anthropological problem, and gives it such a radical treatment that when we lay down the book we have to look at the world with new eyes.

Before we proceed with Lévi-Strauss's analysis, let us firstly understand the meaning of totemism.

### Box 14.1 Totemism

Totemism refers to an institution, mostly found among the tribal community, where the members of each of its clans consider themselves as having descended from a plant, or animal, or any other animate or inanimate object, for which they have a special feeling of veneration, which leads to the formation of a ritual relationship with that object. The plant, animal, or any other object is called 'totem'; the word 'totem', Lévi-Strauss says (p. 86), is taken from the Ojibwa, an Algonquin language of the region to the north of the Great Lakes of Northern America. The members who share the same totem constitute a 'totemic group'. People have a special reverential attitude towards their totem - they abstain from killing and/or eating it, or they may sacrifice and eat it on ceremonial occasions; death of the totem may be ritually mourned; grand celebrations take place in some societies for the multiplication of totems; and totems may be approached for showering blessings and granting long term welfare. In other words, the totem becomes the centre of beliefs and ritual action.

### Reality of Totemism

Lévi-Strauss does not believe in the 'reality' of totemism. He says that totemism was 'invented' and became one of the most favourite anthropological subjects to be investigated with an aim to find its origins and varieties, with the Victorian scholars in the second half of the nineteenth century. By contrast, Lévi-Strauss's study is not of totemism; it is of *totemic phenomena*. In other words, it is an 'adjectival study', and not a 'substantive study', which means that it is a 'study of the phenomena that happen to be totemic' rather than 'what is contained in or what is the substance of totemism'. At his command, Lévi-Strauss has the same data that were available to his predecessors, but the question he asks is entirely new. He does not ask the same question that had been repeatedly asked earlier by several scholars, viz. 'What is totemism?' His question is 'How are totemic phenomena arranged?' The move from 'what' to 'how' was radical at that time (during the 1960s); and Lévi-Strauss's interpretation of totemism was a distinct break with the earlier analyses of totemism (whether they were evolutionary, or diffusionistic, or functional). It is because of this distinctiveness that Poole (p. 9) writes that with Lévi-Strauss, "the 'problem' of totemism has been laid to rest once and for all."

### Action and Reflection 14.1

Describe what is totemism. Can you give an example of totem from your environment? Note down your answer in a notebook.

Lévi-Strauss offers a critique of the explanations that had been (and were) in vogue at that time. Firstly, he rejects the thesis that the members of the American school (Franz Boas, Robert Lowie, A.L. Kroeber) put forth, according to which the totemic phenomena are not a reality *sui generic*. In other words, totemism does not have its own existence and laws; rather it is a product of the general tendency among the 'primitives' to identify individuals and social groups with animal and plant worlds. Lévi-Strauss finds this explanation highly simplistic. He also criticizes the functional views of totemism; for instance, Durkheim's explanation that totemism binds people in a 'moral community' called the church, or Malinowski's idea that the Trobrianders have totems because they are of utilitarian value, for they provide food to people. Malinowski's explanation (which Lévi-Strauss sums up in words like 'totems are good to eat') lacks universality, since there are societies that have totems of non-utilitarian value, and it would be difficult to find the needs that the totem fulfills. Durkheim's thesis of religion as promoting social solidarity may be applicable in societies each with a single religion, but not societies with religious pluralism. Moreover, the functional theory is concerned with the contribution an institution makes towards the maintenance of the whole society, rather than how it is arranged. In other words, the functional theory of totemism deals with the contribution the beliefs and practices of totemism make to the maintenance and well-being of society rather than what is the structure of totemism, and how it is a product of human mind.

### 14.3 The Method

Lévi-Strauss's *Totemism* is principally an exercise in methodology. He does not look for the unity of the phenomenon of totemism; rather, he breaks it down into various visual and intellectual codes. He does not intend to explain totemism, rather he deciphers it - its arrangement. In the first chapter of his book (p. 84), Lévi-Strauss summarizes his methodological programme, which is as follows:

- 1) Define the phenomenon under study as a relation between two or more terms, real or supposed;
- 2) construct a table of possible permutations between these terms;
- 3) take this table as the general object of analysis which, at this level only, can yield necessary connections, the empirical phenomenon considered at the beginning being only one possible combination among others, the complete system of which must be reconstructed beforehand.

We may give here a simple example to understand this from the realm of kinship. Descent, for instance, can be traced from the father or the mother. Let us call the descent traced from the father 'p', and the mother 'q'. Now, let us assign them their respective values: if the side (whether the father's or the mother's) is recognized, we denote it by 1, and if it is not recognized, it is denoted as 0. Now, we can construct the table of the possible permutations: where (1) p is 1, and q is 0; (2) p is 0, and q is 1; (3) p is 1, and q is 1; and (4) p is 0 and q is 0. The first permutation yields the patrilineal society, the second, matrilineal, the third, bilineal, and the last possibility does not exist empirically.

Let us now move to how Lévi-Strauss applies this to totemism. He says that totemism covers relations between things falling in two series - one natural (animals, plants) and the other cultural (persons, clans). For Lévi-Strauss, the 'problem' of totemism arises when two separate chains of experience (one of nature and the other of culture) are confused. Human beings identify themselves with nature in a myriad of ways, and the other

thing is that they describe their social groups by names drawn from the world of animals and plants. These two experiences are different, but totemism results when there is any kind of overlap between these orders. Further, Lévi-Strauss writes: 'The natural series comprises on the one hand *categories*, on the other *particulars*; the cultural series comprises *groups* and *persons*.' He chooses these terms rather arbitrarily to distinguish, in each series, two modes of existence - collective and individual - and also, to keep these series distinct. Lévi-Strauss says that any terms could be used provided they are distinct.

NATURE	Category	Particular
CULTURE	Group	Person

These two sets of terms can be associated in four ways, as is the case with the example given earlier.

	1	2	3	4
NATURE	Category	Category	Particular	Particular
CULTURE	Group	Person	Person	Group

Totemism thus establishes a relationship between human beings (culture) and nature, and, as shown above, this relationship can be divided into four types, and we can find empirical examples of each one of them.

#### Box 14.2 Nature and Culture

Lévi-Strauss says that the example of the first is the Australian totemism ('sex totems' and 'social totems') that postulates a relationship between a natural category and a cultural group. The example of the second is the 'individual' totemism of the North American Indians. Among them, an individual reconciles himself with a natural category. For an example of the third combination, Lévi-Strauss takes the case of the Mota (in the Banks Islands) where a child is thought to be the 'incarnation of an animal or plant found or eaten by the mother when she first became aware that she was pregnant' (p. 85), or what has come to be known as 'incarnational totemism'. Another example of this category may come from certain tribes of the Algonquin group, who believe that a special relation is established between the newborn child and whichever animal is seen to approach the family cabin. The fourth combination (group-particular combination) may be exemplified with cases from tribes of Polynesia and Africa, where certain animals (such as garden lizards in New Zealand, sacred crocodiles and lions and leopards in Africa) are protected and venerated (the sacred animal totemism).

The four combinations are equivalent. It is because they result from the same operation (i.e., the permutation of the elements that comprise a phenomenon). But, in the anthropological literature that Lévi-Strauss examines, it is only the first two that have been included in the domain of totemism, while the other two have only been related to totemism in an indirect way. Some authors have not considered the last two variants of totemism in their discussion. Here, Lévi-Strauss observes that the 'problem of totemism' (or what is called the 'totemic illusion') results from the 'distortion of a semantic field to which belong phenomena of the same type.' The outcome of this is that certain aspects (or the first and second types of totemic phenomena) have been singled out at the expense of others (the third and fourth types), which gives an impression of 'originality' and 'strangeness' that they do not in reality possess.

## 14.4 The Analysis

The fourth chapter of Lévi-Strauss's *Totemism*, titled 'Towards the

'Intellect', presents the work of Raymond Firth, Mayer Fortes, Edward Evans-Pritchard, and the second theory of totemism (of 1951) that Alfred Radcliffe-Brown gave, as containing the germs of a correct interpretation of totemic phenomenon making possible a fully adequate explanation of its content and form. Radcliffe-Brown's first theory of totemism was utilitarian and culture-specific, quite like Malinowski's theory. By comparison, Firth and Fortes do not succumb to an arbitrary explanation or to any factitious evidence. Both of them think that the relationship between totemic systems and natural species is based on a perception of resemblance between them. In Fortes's work on the Tallensi, animals and ancestors resemble each other. Animals are apt symbols for the livingness of ancestors. Fortes shows that among the Tallensi, animals symbolize the potential aggressiveness of ancestors.

Lévi-Strauss applauds the attempt of Firth and Fortes, for they move from a point of view centred on subjective utility (the utilitarian hypothesis) to one of objective analogy. But Lévi-Strauss goes further than this: he says 'it is not the resemblances, but the differences, which resemble each other' (p. 149). In totemism, the resemblance is between the two systems of differences. Let us understand its meaning with the help of an example: the relationship between two clans is like the relationship between two animals, or two birds, or an animal and a bird. It is the difference between the two series that resembles each other.

#### Action and Reflection 14.2

Read section 14.4 and point out the views of Firth and Fortes. How do they differ from Levi-Strauss' position? Write your answer in a note book.

Undoubtedly, Firth and Fortes make a good beginning in interpreting totemism. But we have to move from external analogy (the external resemblance) to internal homology (the identity at the internal level). For Lévi-Strauss, it is Evans-Pritchard's analysis of Nuer religion that allows us to move from the external resemblance to internal homology. Among the Nuer, the twins are regarded as 'birds', not because they are confused with birds or look like them. It is because, the twins, in relation to other persons, are 'persons of the above' in relation to 'persons from below'. And, with respect to birds, they are 'birds of below' in relation to 'birds from above'. The relationship between twins and other men is like the relationship that is deemed to exist between the 'birds of below' and the 'birds of above'. It is a good example of the 'differences which resemble each other' in the 'two systems of differences'. If the statement - or the code - 'twins are birds' directs us to look for some external image, then we are surely bound to be led astray. But if we look into the internal homology in the Nuer system, then we will be closer to the understanding of the code.

At this level, Lévi-Strauss introduces the second theory of Radcliffe-Brown that has taken a decisive and innovative step in interpreting totemism. Instead of asking, 'Why all these birds?', Radcliffe-Brown asks: 'Why particularly eagle-hawk and crow, and other pairs?' Lévi-Strauss considers this question as marking the beginning of a genuine structural analysis. In fact, Radcliffe-Brown observes in this analysis of totemism that the kind of structure with which we are concerned is the 'union of opposites.'

Evans-Pritchard and Radcliffe-Brown, thus, recognize two principles of interpretation which Lévi-Strauss deems fundamental. In his analysis of Nuer religion, Evans-Pritchard shows that the basis of totemic phenomena lies in the interrelation of natural species with social groupings according to the logically conceived processes of metaphor and analogy. In his second theory, Radcliffe-Brown realizes the necessity of an explanation which

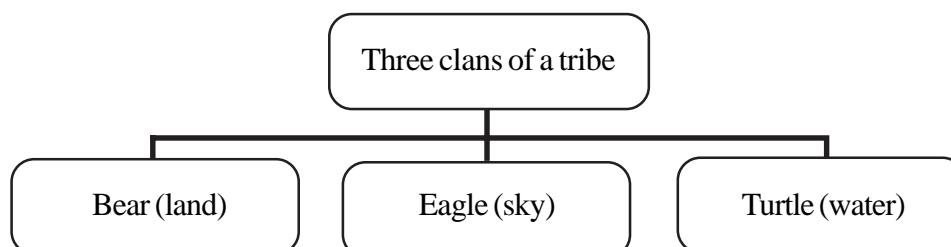
illuminates the principle governing the selection and association of specific pairs of species and types used in classification. These two ideas, Lévi-Strauss thinks, help in the reintegration of content with form, and it is from them that he begins.

## 14.5 Totemism and Classification

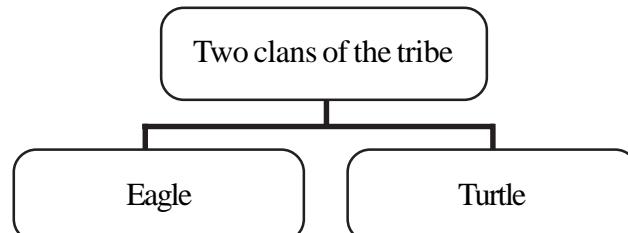
Totemism, for Lévi-Strauss, is a mode of classification. Totemic classifications are regarded as a 'means of thinking' governed by less rigid conditions than what we find in the case of language, and these conditions are satisfied fairly easily, even when some events may be adverse. The functions that totemism fulfill are cognitive and intellectual: 'totems are not good to eat, they are good to think'. The problem of totemism disappears when we realize that all humans, at all points of time, are concerned with one or the other mode of classification, and all classifications operate using mechanisms of differentiation, opposition, and substitution. Totemic phenomena form one aspect of a 'general classificatory ideology'. If it is so, then the problem of totemism, in terms of something distinct that demands an explanation, disappears. Jenkins (1979: 101) writes: 'Totemism becomes analytically dissolved and forms one expression of a general ideological mode of classification.'

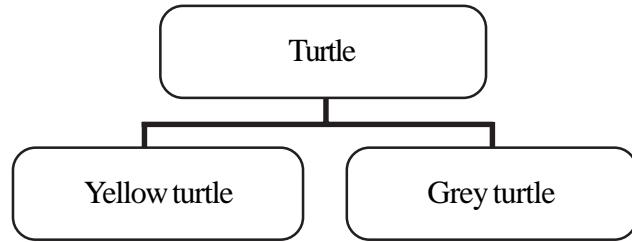
But it does not imply that totemism is static. Although the nature of the conditions under which totemism functions have not been stated clearly, it is clear from the examples that Lévi-Strauss has given that totemism is able to adapt to changes. To illustrate this, a hypothetical example may be taken up. Suppose a society has three clans totemically associated respectively with bear (land), eagle (sky), and turtle (water). Because of demographic changes, the bear clan becomes extinct, but the turtle clan enlarges, and in course of time, splits into two parts. The society faces this change in two ways. First, the same totemic association might be preserved in a damaged form so that the only classificatory/symbolic correlation is now between sky (eagle) and water (turtle). Second, a new correlation may be generated by using the defining characteristics of the species turtle to distinguish between two clans still identified with it. This becomes the basis for the formation of a new symbolic opposition. If, for example, colour is used, yellow and grey turtles may become totemic associations. Yellow and grey may be regarded as expressive of the basic distinction between day and night perhaps. A second system of the same formal type as the first is easily formed through the process of differentiation and opposition (see diagrams of the first and second systems below).

First System Three clans of a tribe



Second System





As is clear, the opposition between sky (eagle) and water (turtle) is split and a new opposition is created by the contrast of day (yellow) and night (grey). In this way, the problems caused by demographic imbalances (i.e., extinction of a clan or the enlargement of the other) are structurally resolved, and the system continues.

## 14.6 Conclusion

To sum up, totemic phenomena are nothing but modes of classification. They provide tribal communities with consciously or unconsciously held concepts which guide their social actions. Food taboos, economic exchanges and kinship relations can be conceptualized and organized using schemes which are comparable to the totemic homology between natural species and social characteristics. Lévi-Strauss (1962) also extends this analysis to understand the relation between totemism and caste system. Totemism is a relationship between man and nature. Similarities and differences between natural species are used to understand the similarities and differences between human beings. Totemism, which for people is a type of religion, is a way of understanding similarities and differences between man and nature. That is the reason why Poole says that with Lévi-Strauss, the problem of totemism has been laid to rest once and for ever. To quote Poole (p. 9):

If we talk about 'totemism' any more, it will be in ignorance of Lévi-Strauss or in spite of him.

## 14.7 Further Reading

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# Unit 15

## Sikhism

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### Contents

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 The Sikh community
- 15.3 Teachings of Guru Nanak
- 15.4 The Sikh Tradition
- 15.5 The Sikh Gurus
- 15.6 Interaction with other faiths
- 15.7 The Martial Background
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- 15.9 Further Reading

### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- outline salient aspects of the Sikh community;
- describe the teachings of Guru Nanak;
- elaborate on the Sikh tradition of Sikhism; and
- detail the interaction of Sikhism with other faiths.

### 15.1 Introduction

Sikhism is one of the most important religion of India. It originated on the soil of Indian society with the teachings of its first saint Guru Nanak Dev ji. The Sikh religion has seen several critical phases and gone through important transformations since the days of Guru Nanak Dev ji its first Guru up to the time of Guru Govind Singh ji, its tenth Guru. The important ideas concerning the Sikh religion matured during this period. We shall discuss this important period of the Sikh history in detail. On the other hand, the Sikh community has evolved later on the basis of the tradition and teachings of its Gurus. What is important for us to know is the way in which the Sikhs have responded to the new challenges of contemporary society. One of most important question relating to the sociology of religion could be like: How one behaves or responds to the questions/challenges of contemporary society while being a Sikh or for that matter representing any other religion Such questions concerning some other religious groups have been discussed in the area of 'Sociology of religion' by some prominent classical as well as contemporary sociologists. Here the broader question, however, is what constitutes the religious/ethnic identity and how does it deal with the questions and challenges of contemporary society.

### 15.2 The Sikh community

The Sikh community constitutes a little less than 2% of the population of India. Although the Sikhs are spread all over India but a larger section of them is located in Punjab state. Although India has been the soil where from the Sikhism originated, but the Sikhs could well be seen all over the world including some European countries, U.S.A. and Canada. However,

there exists a special relationship between the Sikhs and Punjab the place of their origin. The relationship between the Sikhs and Punjab is so strong that sometimes the Sikhs are also referred as Punjabis. But one thing is sure that almost every Sikh speaks of Punjabi as his mother tongue. In fact the notion of 'Punjabi', has taken strides over different cultural groups in certain contacts. Similarly almost every Sikh refers back to religions teachings of its Gurus, Guru Granth Sahib and Akal Takhat.

We are familiar with a man wearing a turban or a lady wearing a Salwar Kurta and can easily identify them as Sikhs, but there are some additional features also which help us. For example, Sikhs invariably wear Kada around their wrists. Although these features of physical appearance are important in itself, but here we are more concerned with some more fundamental questions. The more relevant sociological questions could however be: Who is a Sikh? In other words, here we are more concerned with the Sikh community as it expresses through its own and unique cultural identity. We shall examine these questions in detail and perhaps the most significant answers to such questions can be found in the religious texts. Additionally, the findings of researches conducted by some prominent scholars could also be useful. The same is discussed ahead.

#### **Box 15.1 What is Sikhism?**

W.H. Mc Leod (1999) in 'What is Sikhism?' has dealt with it by asking the same question to a Sikh gentleman. To this question the answer given by the gentleman explains the essence of Sikhism, although in a very simple language. The answer of the gentleman was that "Sikhism can be defined as the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."

Explanation like that are rooted in the Sikh tradition itself dating back to the days of Guru Nanak Dev. In Adi-Granth Guru Nanak Dev has explained the importance of 'nam', 'dan' and 'insan'. Nam refers to 'divine Name' which is Akal Purakh or God. One is to simply associate with nam or God, share one's earnings with others which is 'dan' and strive for pure living which refers to one's making of 'insan'.

### **15.3 Teachings of Guru Nanak**

Guru Nanak Dev's teachings have been summarized of by Kahan Singh explaining the essentials of Sikh dharma in his encyclopedia, Gurusabad ratnakar mahankos. These guidelines refer to individual and corporate respectively. These are the following.

#### **I) For individual**

- i) to achieve mystical union with God (Vahiguru) through meditation on the divine Name.
- ii) to read the sacred scripture (gurbani) daily and to reflect on the doctrines which it imparts.
- iii) to view all men as brothers without concern for caste or race, bestowing love on all and performing services without expectation of reward.
- iv) to secure benefits of religion (dharam) while continuing to live the life of an ordinary layman.
- v) to spurn ignorant notions of untouchability, magic, idol worship and superstition and to accept only the teachings of the Guru.

## II) For Corporate

Sikhism

- i) to observe the Sikh code of conduct (rahit) in the bonds of unity.
- ii) to accept the corporate community (panth) as Guru and to serve it with loyal devotion.
- iii) to proclaim the Guru's teachings to the world.
- iv) to accept with affection all Nanak-panthis as adherents of the Sikh religion, regardless of their outward appearance and to treat people with respect and sympathy.
- v) To observe in Gurdwaras and other shrines the rituals enjoined by the Gurus.

Additionally views like Nam Japo, Kriat Karo, Vand Chhako meaning thereby "repeat divine Name, work hard and give others a portion of what you earn" were also found to be associated with the name Guru Nanak Dev ji.

## 15.4 The Sikh Tradition

After the life and works of Guru Nanak Dev Ji the tradition of the Sikh Gurus continued up to Guru Gobind Singh Ji. It is important to know how this tradition continued and who were the Gurus to carry it forward. A reference to the Sikh Gurus along with there time period is given in the following Box 15.2

### Box 15.2 The Sikh Gurus

The Sikh Gurus and their Period

- 1) Guru Nanak Ddev (1469 - 1539)
- 2) Guru Angad (1504 - 1552)
- 3) Guru Amar Das (1479 - 1574)
- 4) Guru Ram Das (1534 - 1581)
- 5) Guru Arjan (1563 - 1606)
- 6) Guru Hargobind (1595 - 1644)
- 7) Guru Hari Rai (1630 - 1661)
- 8) Guru Hari Krishan (1656 - 1664)
- 9) Guru Teg Bahadur (1621 - 1675)
- 10) Guru Gobind Singh (1666 - 1708)

[Source: W.H. Mc Loed (1999: 133)]

The tradition of the Sikh Guru begins from Guru Nanak Dev and scholars studying this tradition have given considerable importance to him. Guru Nanak Dev made a significant contribution by establishing a new tradition of religious thinking and guidance therefore it seems proper to know about the Sikh religion since beginning i.e. since the lifetime contribution of its first Guru. Here we shall examine some important aspects related to Guru Nanak Dev Ji's life and his contribution to Sikh relation.

### Action and Reflection 15.1

Talk to some sikh boys and girls. Ask them how many gurus of sikhism they can remember. Note down your findings.

Baba Guru Nanak Dev Ji, as he is known today among the followers of Sikh religion, devoted his life completely for the ideas, thoughts and actions which he considered important to promote it. During the course of promoting the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev ji toured several important places, met a variety of scholars from some other religions and displayed

remarkable understanding of the people and events. In this intellectual journey he met several people who have later commented on the life and works of Guru Nanak Dev ji. It is an indirect way of knowing about him as it is told by others.

#### **Box No. 15.3 The Janam Sakhis**

Some significant people who knew him, of course in their own different ways, have conveyed us about his life these contributions are known as janam - sakhis in the Sikh tradition. About Guru Nanak Dev ji's life at least three such janam - sakhis were available. The life and works of Guru Nanak Dev ji, have been attempted on the basis of the contributions made according to: (i) Bhai Gurdas : (ii) Puratan Janam - Sikhis and (iii) Miharban Janam Sakhi.

Although these are some of the different ways to understand his life and works but inspite of a few variations in the opinion of scholars, the method of janam sakhis remains very important. Some of the important aspects of the life and works of Guru Nanak Dev ji can be referred here as it emerged on the basis of the analysis of these janam - sakhis. According to the description available in the sakhis, Guru Nanak Dev Ji visited several religious places on festive occasions. There are descriptions available of his visits to Mount Sumeru, Mecca Madina and Baghbad. There were instances of some religious debates at each of theses places and each time Guru Nank Dev ji was able to prove his own point of view. In one of such discourses he pointed out that Hindus and Muslims when they refer to Ram and Rahim respectively they actually mean one and the same God. His visits to Kartarpur, Achal Batala and Multan are said to be associated with such events where he displayed some miracles.

Baba Guru Nanak Dev is said to have born in the month of the Vaisakh, S. 1526 (A.D. 1469) as a son of Kalu, resident of the village Rai Bhoi di Talwandi. He started to display some mysterious things and inclination towards spirituality at the age of five years. Seeing this phenomenon in action Hindus thought him to be an incarnation of God in human form and Muslim thought him to be a true follower of God.

Parents got him married, but he displayed the symptoms of withdrawal from worldly activities. He was invited by Nawab Daulat Khan of Sultanpur and was duly impressed by him. Sakhis also tell us about Guru Nanak Dev was lifted by the messengers of God for divine court where he was given a cup of nectar (amrit) with the command to drink it with "My Name (Nam)". He did it and returned to the world to preach the divine Name. Some other details regarding his birth and some other important events are available in Miharban Janam Sakhi which is also known as Pothi Sach - Khand.

### **15.5 The Sikh Gurus**

These and some other details would be found in Janam - Sakhis, but it seems important at this stage to realise that it could help us as a method to investigate into the details of the life of Baba Guru Nanak Dev ji. The tradition thus established by him was later known as the Nanak - panth all Gurus upto Guru Govind Singh as well as other believers followed it. Nanak - panthi allegiance constituted some local groups as sangats which sang the songs devoted to Gurus hymns. These satsangs were generally held at dharamshalas where caste discriminations were not allowed. The Punjabi community which was otherwise divided along caste lines was seen as a united entity while observing satsangs. Here we could see the emergence of the Sikh religion as a strong force which displayed unity among various

castes. On the other hand each one was well aware of his caste identity with larger Punjabi community. The Sikh Gurus visited several places on festive occasions and in this context it is important to mention the name of Amritsar where Guru Arjan (Fifth Guru) supervised the compiling of a sacred scripture for the panth. In the early seventeenth century Hargobind succeeded his father Arjan as the sixth Guru Hargobind came across different and perhaps difficult conditions of society. This was the period when the Sikh Guru had to come out of the earlier environment where Gurus were confined to dharamsholas and religious visits outside. Some significant change could be seen around this period i.e. at the time of the Sixth Guru Hargobind. Guru Hargobind symbolically referred to two swordswomen referring to spiritual authority (Piri) and the other referring to as the newly achieved temporal power (Miri). On the basis of this piri miri combination, a new building known as Akal Takhat was erected Akal Takhat faces Harmandar Sahib (The Golden Temple) at Amritsar. It reflected a transformation within the Sikh Panth. Some scholars like W.H. Mc Leod (1999 : 25) have referred this militant tradition to the earlier existing Jat culture. However it has been contradicted by some later scholars like Jagjit Singh (1981) Not much happened during the middle years of the seventeenth century and it appeared as if the Sikh tradition might return back to its earlier days of religious glory. But one important incident happened during this time.

#### **Box 15.4 Guru Teg Bahadur's Sacrifice**

Guru Teg Bahadur, The ninth Guru faced a difficult time between 1664-75 and allowed himself to sacrifice his life at the hands of the Mughal rulers in the expectation that some brave men shall rise against Mughal tyranny.

Fearing the same fate some Sikhs chose to remain silent but the next Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh came heavily against this cowardice and came out with the ways and means suggesting that the Sikhs would not be able to hide themselves anymore and be recognized where ever they were present. He symbolically suggested the use of steel in their hands and steel in the soul of the panth. He also decided to do away with the earlier experiment with the decentralization of power and demanded everyone's commitment to the central authority Sikhs were thus required to become members of his Khalis or Khalsa Guru Gobind Singh is also known to have discontinued with the tradition of appointing Sikh Gurus. In this way Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth and the last Guru of the Sikh religions. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Ranjit Singh conquered Lahore. He became Maharaj of Lahore in 1801 and since then 'raj Karega Khalsa' prophecy become popular. After the Anglo - Sikh war Punjab was taken over by the Britishers in 1849. The conflicts of the Sikhs with the Mughals and Afghans as well as with the Britishers could be seen all along the history. In this process of confrontation, the Sikh religion has emerged out and transformed itself according to the evergrowing challenges.

## **15.6 Interaction with other faiths**

The Sikh religion throughout its history has had interactions with the people of other faith namely Hinduism and Islam. There are some other instances also like the caste factor coming in the way of Sikhism. As we have seen earlier as well, everyone within Sikh religion was well aware of his caste - origins. We have also seen that at the places of religious activities like in the dharamsholas the Gurus never allowed any discriminations, but in the social life caste played its important role. In the Sikh tradition a typical combination of religion and caste could be

seen. To illustrate just one such case the combination of Sikh religion with Jat culture has been an important issue which is discussed in various scholarly as well as popular writing. There is no dispute however, among the scholars about the origin of Jats. All scholars think alike that the Jats were basically of Aryan origin, settled in and around Punjab and also is some other adjacent plain areas. Kushwant Singh (1999) has argued that with them the Jats brought the Panchayat system in which the five senior members of the community commanded the supreme power within the village. Their decisions were just like the bindings on others.

#### Action and Reflection 15.2

Talk to Jat Sikhs about their role in Sikhism. Note down your findings.

Every Jat village was like a small republic and a considerable level of equality was observed among the Jats who happened to be kinsmen. However, some inequality was clearly observable between the Jats and some other castes. The notion of freedom and equality enjoyed by the Jats kept them away from Brahminical Hinduism. The denigration of the Jats by upper caste Hindus did not result in lowering down the position or the Jats in their own eyes, nor did it help in upgrading the status of Brahmins and Kshatriyas. The Jats were considered born as workers and the warriors. The Jats did not flee from the village in the case of invasion and went for the revenge in case the outsiders molested the women. The Punjabi Jats were generally ready to risk their lives against any odds. For such reasons the Jat connection with the Sikh community suddenly becomes important. The Jats thus played a significant role in the Sikh militancy. It also explains a typical combination of piri and miri in the Sikh religion. This should, however, not create the impression that the Jats were the only caste which represented the Sikh religion. For example, the Ramgarhia Sikhs were represented by the artisan caste. It also constitutes an important section within the Sikh community.

### 15.7 The Martial Background

The Sikh Community has been living under the conditions where there had been battles with others, particularly the invaders. Throughout their period of history they had to enter into conflict with others. They tried several permutations and combinations to fight against the Afghan invaders. One afghan invader Ahmad Shah Abdali made at least nine invasions, the Sikhs sought the help from the rulers of Delhi and Marathas. The biggest challenge before the Sikh community was from the Afghan rulers. The Afghan rulers had made several attempts to capture the territory under the Sikh rulers. Maharajah Ranjit Singh's able leadership thwarted many such attempts. The much discussed event of history known as the 'consolidation of the Punjab' could be attributed to the able leadership of Maharajah Ranjit Singh. On the one hand Marajah Ranjit Singh was able to prevent the Afghan rulers from invading the Punjab region on the other to fight against the Gurkhas and thus restricting their influence upto Nepal only. The Sikh community thus contributed to the 'consolidation of Punjab' which was very significant event related to them. Later even the British rulers favoured the Sikh Community leadership to fight against the Afghan invaders. The first Punjabi victory over the Afghan became possible in 1813 after the Battle of Attock. After that the Afghans lost power in the Northern India and were pushed back to their own territory. After the consolidation of the Punjabi power under the leadership of Maharajah Ranjit Singh apparently there were cordial relations between them and the then emerging British Power. But the Punjabi leadership, particularly Maharajah Ranjit Singh was well aware of the British power. The Sikh leaders realized soon that the Britishers would sooner or later would like

to take over the rule from them in Punjab. Later on the British power consolidated itself leading to the annexation of the Punjab. The Britishers promised the rule of law in the land of Punjab and initiated some development works there. In the Sipoy Mutiny of 1857, the Sikhs stood with the Britishers and as a result of this more and more Sikhs were recruited to the army. During the period of the world war I (1914 – 1918) the Sikhs numbered about one fifth of the total army. As a result of the proximity of the Sikhs to the British rulers, some of them although in a very small number, had the opportunity to seek migration to the United States and Canada.

## 15.8 Conclusion

The Sikh community has evolved in a meaningful way, has seen ten Gurus (from Guru Nanak Devji upto Guru Gobind Singh ji). Guru Granth Sahib is their religious text based upon the sacred scriptures compiled by Guru Arjan during 1603-04. It is also known as Adi-Granth. However, later developments in the eighteenth and early nineteen century, a zealous sikh came to be known as Akal Purakh and in twentieth century Akali Dal (Akali Party) was formed. Within the Sikh community, some castes have acquired prominence like Jats and Ahluwalias. During the recent times some sects or groups within the Sikh community have come to prominence like, Ramgarhias, Nirankaris, Mazhabis and Namdhari Sikhs owing allegiance to different cultural identities. In Punjab all the historic Gurudwaras are now controlled by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee commonly known as SGPC. The Sikh community has also evolved in its relationship with some other communities like Hindus and Muslims.

## 15.9 Further Reading

Mc Leod, W.H. (1999), *Sikhs and Sikhism* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

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# Unit 16

## Jainism and Buddhism

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- 16.2 Jainism: The History
- 16.3 Religious Practices
- 16.4 Doctrine of Jainism
- 16.5 Religious Symbolism and Iconography
- 16.6 Buddhism: Main Traditions
- 16.7 Doctrine of Buddhism
- 16.8 Historical Development in India
- 16.9 Diffusion of Buddhism
- 16.10 Buddhism in the West
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- 16.12 Further Reading

### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- outline the history of Jainism;
- describe the doctrine of Jainism;
- discuss doctrine of Buddhism;
- trace the diffusion of Buddhism; and
- Present Buddhism in the West.

### 16.1 Introduction

The conditions underlying the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism in ancient India were those generally characteristic of a wider process of socio-cultural transition which took place in the first millennium B C across the face of the civilized world, from Greece to China. In the principal centers of the high cultures, archaic social and religious institutions were breaking down under the pressure from more complex forms of economic and political activity, associated with urban revolution and the territorial expansion of new imperial states. In all cases, apparent economic and political advances were mixed with serious social disorders, hardship, and loss of traditional religious moorings. In this process of transformation, new philosophical and religious solutions were sought and attained by the formative thinkers whose teachings still lie behind the institutions and way of life of the world today.

The 6th Century B.C was a period of religious turmoil in India. Simple Religious life of ancient India had become complex, elaborate and expensive in due course of time. The prevalence of the Brahmanical system based on the complicated sacrifice and elaborate ceremonies created unrest among the common people. Further, caste system became rigid creating

inequalities in the society. The Brahmins who now adorned the status of being the highest in the society provoked religious propagators to preach a new philosophy of life and death. Many sects arose which were advocating diverse opinions about God and ways of attaining Moksha. The prevailing ethos common to all these religious perspectives was asceticism, which stood in contrast to the ritualistic Brahmanic schools associated with the earliest period of classical Hinduism. Prominent among them were Buddhism and Jainism which emerged in India around 800-600 BC. They denied the ultimacy of the Vedas and the ritual significance of caste and gave messages of salvation based on personal conversion, usually without ascriptive limitations of caste, class, sex. Their teachings found rich soil among the upwardly mobile urban commercial groups.

#### Action and Reflection 16.1

Discuss the conditions which led to the rise of Jainism and Buddhism?

## 16.2 Jainism: The History

We now turn to the history of Jainism. Jainism, as believed by its followers is said to have originated in the antiquity. Mahavira was the 24<sup>th</sup> and last Tirthankara (literally "Ford-maker") of the current age (kalpa) of the world. Tirthankaras, also called Jinas, are revealers of the Jaina religious path (dharma) who have crossed over life's stream of rebirths and have set the example that all Jainas must follow. Born as the son of a Kshatriya chieftain, Vardhman Mahavira renounced his princely status to take up the ascetic life at the age of 30. Over a period of 12 years, he suffered the most self-denying hardships until he finally reached enlightenment and began to teach others. There remains no objective document concerning the beginnings of Jainism. The date of Mahavira's death ("entry into Nirvana"), which is the starting point of the traditional Jain chronology, corresponds to 527/526 BCE. However some scholars believe it occurred about one century later.

Mahavira's acknowledged status as the 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankara (or *Jina*) means that Jainas perceive him as the last revealer in this cosmic age of the Jaina Dharma. Mahavira had eleven disciples (called *ganadharas*), all of whom were Brahmin converts to Jainism. All of them founded monastic lineages, but only two- Indrabhuti Gautama and Sudharman, disciples who survived Mahavira- served as the points of origin for the historical Jaina monastic community.

The community appears to have grown quickly in number. However it was subject to several schismatic movements. The most significant division was that between the *Svetambaras* (literally, white-robed") and the *Digambaras* ("sky-clad"; i.e. naked) which persists till today. The major points of difference between the two concern the question of proper monastic attire and whether or not a soul can attain liberation from a female body (a possibility the Digambaras deny). These differences were formalized through a series of councils that met to preserve and codify the teachings of Mahavira in written form. It was felt that the teachings, preserved orally since his death, were in danger of being lost. Four councils were held between the 4<sup>th</sup> century B C and the 5<sup>th</sup> century A D. The last one held at Valabhi in Saurashtra (modern day Gujarat) codified the Svetambara canon that is still in use. However the Digambaras deny the authenticity of this corpus and instead recognize the authority of "proto-canonical" treatises.

After Mahavira's time the Jain community spread along the caravan routes from Magadh (Bihar) to the west and south. They claimed to have enjoyed

the favor of numerous rulers, including king Bimbisara of Magadh and later the Mauryan Emperor Chandragupta Maurya. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Digambaras were influential in the Deccan, especially in Karnataka. Under the Ganga, Rashtrakutas and other Dynasties, Jain culture undoubtedly flourished. As for Svetambaras, they were especially successful in Gujarat where their famous pontiff, Hemachandra served as a minister in the kingdom. Elaborate sanctuaries were erected, such as that on Mount Abu, now in Rajasthan. The rise of several sects testifies to the vitality of the Svetambaras, who even succeeded in interesting the Mughal Emperor Akbar in the Jain doctrine.

Although the Jain community never regained its former splendor, it did not disappear entirely. Nowadays, the Digambaras are firmly established in Maharashtra and Karnataka and the Svetambaras in Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat. In modern times, Svetambaras Jainism has maintained a more effective organization and has a larger monastic community than its Digambara counterpart. Both communities devote much energy to maintaining temples and publishing critical editions of their religious texts.

Jainas have traditionally been professional and mercantile people. These trades have made them adaptable to other environments and societies besides those of India. Many Jains have migrated overseas, and this has had the result of increasing international awareness of Jainism.

### 16.3 Religious Practices

All Jains are members of the four-fold congregation (*samgha*), composed of monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen. They share a common belief in the *triratna* (three jewels): *samyagdarsana* ('right faith'), *samyagnana* ('right knowledge') and *samyakcaritra* ('right conduct'). Observance of the "three jewels" provides the conditions for the attainment of the goal, which is liberation from bondage. Deliverance can be attained only by the *nirgrantha*, the Jain monk free from bonds both external and internal. Ideal practices are thus in force in the (male) religious community. Nevertheless, householders are permitted certain ceremonies such as the worship of images (a practice borrowed from Hinduism). Both the lay and the monastic followers must take solemn vows (*vratas*), which form the basis of Jain ethics and guides the pious believers' lives.

The monks and nuns take the five 'great vows' (*mahavrata*s), pledging to abstain from: injuring life; false speech; taking what is not given; unchastity; appropriation. A sixth vow consists of abstaining from taking food and drink at night with the aim to avoid injury to insects which might go unnoticed at night.

Ordinary monks and nuns live in a 'company' (*gana*) where they benefit from the advice of their superiors and from the active solidarity of their brethren. The *gana* is further subdivided into smaller units.

#### Box 16.1 Ordination in Jainism

Religious age and hierarchy play a great role. Elders look into the material and spiritual welfare of the company. *Upadhyaya* is a specialist in teaching the scripture and *Acharya* acts as a spiritual master. Full ordination of a member takes place after a short novitiate that lasts approximately four months. Full admission entails taking the five great vows mentioned above. The *nirgranthas* (monks) are also called *bhikshu* (mendicant) or *sadhu* (pious); the *nigranthis* (nuns) are called *bhikshuni* or *sadhvi*. Monks and nuns must observe the utmost reserve. The nuns' status however is always inferior to that of the monk.

Right religious conduct is minutely defined, giving rules for habitation and wandering, begging, study, confession and penances. The begging tour is important in a community where the religious members have no possessions, hence it is minutely codified. Begging and fasting must be conducted with great care and preceded confession (*alocana*) and repentance (*pratikramana*), which are deemed essential activities.

Called *sravakas* ("listeners") or *upasakas* ("servants"), the lay believers also take five main vows, similar to the *mahavratas*, and hence termed *anuvratas* ("lesser vows"). These include *ahimsa*, (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *dana* (charity) etc.

These practices are evidently relevant in a doctrine that emphasizes individual exertion, and that considers the *jinas* to be inaccessible, liberated souls. On the other hand, the Jain church has not been able to ignore the devotional aspirations of the laity, who are also attracted by Hindu ritual. All these practices are believed to lead the soul to achieve its own "perfection" (*siddhi*), acting as vehicles through which one crosses the stream of the innumerable rebirths.

## 16.4 Doctrine of Jainism

The Jainas religious goal is the complete perfection and purification of the soul. This can only occur when the soul is in a state of eternal liberation from and nonattachment to corporeal bodies. To understand how the Jainas perceive and address the problem of impediments towards the liberation of soul, it is imperative to explain the Jaina conception of reality.

Time, according to Jainas, is eternal and formless. It is conceived as a wheel with 12 spokes called *aras* (ages), six making an ascending arc where man progresses in knowledge, age, stature and happiness and six a descending one where he deteriorates. The two cycles joined together make one rotation of the wheel of time, which is called a *kalpa*.

Jainas divide the inhabited universe into five parts. The lower world (*adhloka*) is subdivided into seven tiers, each one darker and more tortuous than the one above it. The middle world (*madhyaloka*) consists of numberless concentric continents separated by seas, the centre continent which is called *jambudvipa*. Human beings occupy *jambudvipa*, the second continent and half of the third; the focus of Jaina activity, however, is *jambudvipa*, the only continent on which it is possible for the soul to achieve liberation. The celestial world (*urdhvaloka*) consists of two categories of heaven. At the apex of the occupied universe is the *siddhasila*, the crescent-shaped abode of liberated souls (*siddhas*).

Jain reality is constituted by *jiva* (soul or living substance) and *ajiva* (non-soul or inanimate substance). The essential characteristics of *jiva* are consciousness, bliss and energy. In its pure state, *jiva* possesses these qualities in infinite measure. The souls, infinite in number, are divisible in their embodied state into two main classes, immobile and mobile, according to the number of sense organs possessed by the body they inhabit. The Jainas believe that the four elements (earth, fire, water, air) are also animated by souls. Moreover the universe is full of an infinite number of minute beings, *nigodas*, which are slowly evolving.

Matter furnishes to the soul a body in which to be incorporated and the possibility of corporeal functions. There are five kinds of bodies, each having different functions. All corporeal beings possess at least two of them, the 'karmic' and the 'fiery'. The karmic body results from previous actions; it is intimately attached to the *jiva*, for whom it causes servitude. Hence arise incarnation and transmigration, that is, the law of the universe.

Bondage occurs because the subtle matter resulting from anterior intentions and volitions is attracted to the soul exercised by the means of speech, body and mind. The subtle matter that has been attracted becomes *karman* when entering the soul. The pious Jain strives to get rid of these material extrinsic elements. When life ends, the jiva, if it has recovered its essential nature, immediately rejoins the other siddhas at the pinnacle of the universe, otherwise takes rebirth determined by its *karman*.

The process of bondage and liberation then may be summarized in the following categories: 1) *jiva* 2) *ajiva* 3) influx of karmic matter into the *jiva* 4) bondage 5) stoppage of the karmic influx (*samvara*) 6) expulsion (*nirjara*) of previously accumulated karmic matter 7) total liberation.

#### Action and Reflection 16.2

How, according to Jainism can one achieve liberation of soul which was their ultimate goal?

## 16.5 Religious Symbolism and Iconography

Image worship was introduced at an early stage in Jainism. However, *jina* himself appears to have made no statement regarding the worship of images. Descriptions of stupas, commemorative pillars and tree shrines appear early Jaina texts, which also refer to the worship in the heavens by gods of images of the four legendary *sasvata jinas* ("eternal victors")

The distinctive feature of the Jain shrine is the image of the tirthankara to whom it is dedicated and the idols of the prophets who flank him or occupy the various surrounding niches. Secondary divinities are frequently added. There are also auspicious and symbolic diagrams: the wheel of Jaina law, and the "five supreme ones"- *arhats*, *siddhas*, *acaryas*, *upadhyas*, and *sadhus*. There are also conventional representations of Continents, of Holy places and of the great festive congregation in the middle of which the Jina is said to have delivered his sermon for the benefit of all creatures. In effect, the Jaina temple is often said to be a sort of replica of this assembly.

Stupas were among the first monuments to be erected by the Jain community. Soon the Buddhists alone continued this tradition, so that in effect, the Jains have two main types of architectural masterpieces: rock-cut and structural temples. It is probably in western India that the Jain temples are the most numerous and impressive

Through the ages the Jainas, though a minority, have clearly occupied a major place in Indian history. Their culture is both original and influenced by the Brahmanic society surrounding them. Conversely, their presence has probably encouraged certain tendencies of Hinduism, perhaps the most outstanding of which are the high value set on asceticism and the faith in ahimsa. The spread of Jainism remained largely confined to India where they form an admittedly small but nonetheless influential and comparatively progressive community of 2,604,837 people (1981 census).

## 16.6 Buddhism: Main Traditions

We now turn to the main traditions of Buddhism. Buddhism focuses on the teachings of Gautama Buddha, who was born in Kapilavastu (now Nepal) with the name Siddhârtha Gautama around the fifth century BC. Buddhism spread throughout the Indian subcontinent in the five centuries following the Buddha's passing, and propagated into Central, Southeast, and East Asia over the next two millennia. It underwent a massive process of missionary diffusion throughout the Asian world, assimilating new values and undergoing major changes in doctrinal and institutional principles.

The traditional distinction between the major historical forms of Buddhism has centred on a three-fold typology. It is based on doctrinal and institutional differences which seem to fall within relatively homogeneous geographical areas. They are:

- 1) The *Theravada* (" teaching of the elders"), located in Southeast Asia- especially in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia
- 2) *Mahayana* ("great vehicle") in Nepal, Sikkim, China, Korea And Japan
- 3) *Tantrayana* ("esoteric vehicle") formerly prevalent in Tibet, Mongolia and parts of Siberia

Today *Theravada* represents the sole survivor of the numerous ancient Indian schools. It has a fixed body of canonical literature , a relatively unified orthodox teaching and a clearly structured institutional distinction between the monastic order and laity. On the other hand, the Mahayana is a diffuse and a vastly complex combination of several schools and sects based on a heterogeneous literature of massive proportions.certain key scriptures exist which are regarded as typifying the more universal thrust of mahayana principles over the theravada teachings. The *Theravada* teachings has traditionally been stigmatized as Hinayan ( "small vehicle") by the Mahayanists. Tantric buddhism, dominantly identified with Tibetan lamaism and its theocracy, is equally ambiguous. The esoteric tantric teachings, which originated in india, persisted in several so-called Mahayan schools in China and Japan. In its Tibetan form tantric Buddhism was richly fused with a native primitivism, and it underwent important and very divergent sectarian developments.

Amid this diversity there are few central elements which can be considered as trhe general characteristic of Buddhism throughout the larger part of history. Symbol of Buddha is the common point of unity- revered chiefly as a human teacher in *Theravada* and worshipped as a supreme deity in certain forms of theistic *Mahayana*. The voluntary act of personal conversion in response to the teaching irrespective of the social, ethnic or geographic origin is commonly prevalent.

## 16.7 Doctrine of Buddhism

The term Buddha, meaning "Enlightened one", refers to the spiritual awakening of an Indian prince, named Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in the 6th century BC. Renouncing the privileges of his royal life, he sought to investigate spiritual truth. On so doing, he passed into the state of enlightenment, known as *nirvana* , which literally means "without desire". Soon he inspired many disciples and came to be known as the "Sage of the Sakya tribe" or Sakyamuni and evolved his own teaching (*Dharma*). He then embarked on a missionary career, preaching his message of salvation openly to all. He formed an ever widening community (*sangha*) of mendicant disciples from all castes, including women and lay devotees.

The major forms of tradition represent the buddha as teaching an exoteric, practical Yoga which followed the so-called middle path- a means between the extremes of bodily indulgence, self-mortification and speculative philosophy. It is based on the conviction that neither ritual manipulation of external physical forms( including radical asceticism eg. Jainism) , nor abstract intellectualism can touch the real core of the human problem.

The Buddha taught that in life there exists sorrow / suffering which is caused by desire and it can be cured (ceased) by following the Noble Eightfold Path This teaching is called the "Four Noble Truths". The Four Noble Truths was the topic of the first sermon given by the Buddha after his enlightenment<sup>1</sup>, which was given to the ascetics with whom he had practiced austerities:

- 1) Suffering: All creatures' existence is marked by suffering, an agonized bondage to the meaningless cycle of rebirths amid a transitory flux which is impermanent (*anitya*) and without essential being(*anatman*).
- 2) The cause of suffering: The desire which leads to renewed existence (rebirth).
- 3) The cessation of suffering: The cessation of desire.
- 4) The way leading to the cessation of suffering: The Noble Eightfold Path:

The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to the cessation of suffering, the fourth part of the Four Noble Truths. In order to fully understand the noble truths and investigate whether they were in fact true, Buddha recommended that a certain path be followed which consists of: Right Viewpoint - Realizing the Four Noble Truths ;Right Values - Commitment to mental and ethical growth in moderation ;Right Speech - One speaks in a non hurtful, not exaggerated, truthful way ;Right Actions - Wholesome action, avoiding action that would do harm ;Right Livelihood - One's job does not harm in any way oneself or others; directly or indirectly (weapon maker, drug dealer, etc.) ;Right Effort - One makes an effort to improve ;Right Mindfulness - Mental ability to see things for what they are with clear consciousness ;Right Meditation - State where one reaches enlightenment and the ego has disappeared

The solidarity of the earliest mendicant community was centred on the charisma and teaching of the buddha. However the growing number of converts, the addition of lay devotees and the settlement of a number of communities forced the routinization of discipline and teaching.

## 16.8 Historical Development in India

During the first several centuries after the buddha's death, the story of his life was remembered and embellished, his teachings were preserved and developed and the community that he had established became religious force. Many of the followers of the Buddha who were wandering ascetics began to settle in permanent monastic institutions and to develop the procedures needed to maintain large monastic institutions. At the same time, the Buddhist laity came to include important members of the economic and political elite.

### Box 16.2 The Buddhist Tradition

During the first century of its existence , Buddhism spread from its place of origin in Magadha and Kosala throughout much of Northern India, including the areas of mathura and Ujjayani in the west. According to the Buddhist tradition, invitations to the council of Vaisali, held just over a century after Buddha's death, were sent to monks living in many distant places throughout Northern and Central India. The third ruler of the Mauryan empire, king Ashoka converted to Buddhism and promoted Buddhist Missionary movements. Subsequently Buddhism succeeded in maintaining and even expanding its influence. Buddhist monastic centres and magnificent Buddhist Monuments such as the Great Stupa at Barhut and Sanchi were established . It benefited from extensive royal and popular support in Northwestern India under the Pala dynasty from the eight to the twelfth century, but Hindu philosophy and theistic(bhakti) movements were critics of Buddhism.

Hardly any distinct Buddhist presence continued in India after the last of the great Monasteries were destroyed by the Muslims. Since the early 1900s, however, a significant Buddhist presence has been re-established. A number of Buddhist societies were organized by Indian intellectuals who found

Buddhism as an alternative to a Hindu tradition that they could no longer accept. Following the Chinese quest of Tibet in the late 1950s, there was an influx of Tibetan buddhists who established a highly visible Buddhist community in Northern India. In addition to the incorporation of Sikkim in 1975 into the Republic of India, a strong Buddhist tradition related to the *Vajrayan* Buddhism of Tibet has been brought to India.

The major component in the contemporary reveal of Buddhism in India has been the mass conversion of large number of people from the scheduled castes. This conversion movement, originally led by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar began in the 1950s. In October 1956 Ambedkar and several thousands of his followers converted to Buddhism and the group has continued to grow since then.

## 16.9 Diffusion of Buddhism

The first clear evidence of the spread of Buddhism outside India dates from the reign of King Ashoka (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC). According to his inscriptions, Ashoka sent Buddhist emissaries not only to many different regions of the sub-continent but also into certain border areas as well.

### SRI LANKA

Sri Lankan Buddhism belongs to the Theravada tradition. About 69% of the country adheres to Buddhism. Sri Lanka is the country with longest continuous history of Buddhism. Theravada has been the major religion in the island since soon after its introduction in the 2nd century BC by Venerable Mahinda, the son of the Emperor Ashoka of India during the reign of Sri Lanka's King Devanampiyatissa. During this time, a sapling of the Bodhi Tree was also brought Sri Lanka and became known as Sri Maha Bodhi.

The different orders of the Theravada are referred to as *Nikayas*, and in Sri Lanka there are three: 1) *Siam Nikaya*, founded in the 18th century by a Thai monk who perceived corruption in the sangha and wished to purify its practices 2) *Amarapura Nikaya*, founded in 1800 after ordination within Burma by lower-caste Buddhists who objected to the previously dominant practice of selective ordination from the higher-castes 3) *Ramanna Nikaya*, founded in 1864 by Ambagahawatte Saranankara.

### SOUTHEAST ASIA

Through trade connection, commercial settlements, and even political interventions, India started to strongly influence Southeast Asian countries. Trade routes linked India with southern Burma, central and southern Siam, lower Cambodia and southern Vietnam, and numerous urbanized coastal settlements were established there.

From the 5th to the 13th century, South-East Asia had very powerful empires and became extremely active in Buddhist architectural and artistic creation. The main Buddhist influence now came directly by sea from the Indian subcontinent, so that these empires essentially followed the Mahayana faith. The Sri Vijaya Empire to the south and the Khmer Empire to the north competed for influence, and their art expressed the rich Mahayana pantheon of the Bodhisattvas. Following the destruction of Buddhism in mainland India during the 11th century, Mahayana Buddhism declined in Southeast Asia, to be replaced by the introduction of Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka.

In the areas east of the Indian subcontinent (today's Burma), Indian culture strongly influenced the Mons. The Mons are said to have been converted to Buddhism around 200 BCE under the proselytizing of the Indian king

Ashoka, before the scission between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism. The Buddhist art of the Mons was especially influenced by the Indian art of the Gupta and post-Gupta periods, and their mannerist style spread widely in Southeast Asia following the expansion of the Mon kingdom between the 5th and 8th centuries. The Theravada faith expanded in the northern parts of Southeast Asia under Mon influence, until it was progressively displaced by Mahayana Buddhism from around the 6th century CE.

Buddhism in Cambodia dates back to at least the 5th century A.D. Jayavarman of Fu-nan, Suryavarman I and Jayavarman VII were Buddhists. Up to the 13th century, Cambodia was primarily influenced by Mahayana Buddhism and Saivism. After the 13th century Theravada Buddhism became the main religion of Cambodia

Three schools of Mahayana Buddhism, now most influential, were imported into Vietnam: Zen Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, and Vajrayana Buddhism. Zen Buddhism, known as ThiÁn in Vietnam, is a branch of Buddhism created by the Indian monk Bodhidharma in China at the beginning of the 6th century. Zen is an abbreviation of *Dhyana*.

## CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia long played the role of a meeting place between China, India and Persia. During the 2nd century BC, the expansion of the Former Han to the west brought them into contact with the Hellenistic civilizations of Asia, especially the Greco-Bactrian Kingdoms. Thereafter, the expansion of Buddhism to the north led to the formation of Buddhist communities and even Buddhist kingdoms in the oases of Central Asia. Some Silk Road cities consisted almost entirely of Buddhist stupas and monasteries, and it seems that one of their main objectives was to welcome and service travelers between east and west.

The Hinayana traditions first spread among the Turkic tribes before combining with the Mahayana forms during the 2nd and 3rd centuries BCE to cover modern-day Pakistan, Kashmir, Afghanistan, eastern and coastal Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. These were the ancient states of Gandhara, Bactria, Parthia and Sogdia from where it spread to China. Among the first of these Turkic tribes to adopt Buddhism was the Turki-Shahi who adopted Buddhism as early as the 3rd century BCE. It was not, however, the exclusive faith of this region. There were also Zoroastrians, Hindus, Nestorian Christians, Jews, Manichaeans, and followers of shamanism, Tengrism, and other indigenous, nonorganized systems of belief.

Buddhism in Central Asia started to decline with the expansion of Islam and the destruction of many stupas in war from the 7th century. The Muslims accorded them the status of dhimmis as "people of the Book", such as Christianity or Judaism and Al-Biruni wrote of Buddha as prophet "burxan".

Buddhism saw a surge during the reign of Mongols following the invasion of Genghis Khan and the establishment of the Il Khanate and the Chagatai Khanate who brought their Buddhist influence with them during the 13th century, however within a 100 years the Mongols would convert to Islam and spread Islam across all the regions across Central Asia

## KOREA

Buddhism was introduced around 372 CE, when Chinese ambassadors visited the Korean kingdom of Goguryeo, bringing scriptures and images. Buddhism prospered in Korea, and in particular Seon (Zen) Buddhism from the 7th

century onward. However, with the beginning of the Confucian Yi Dynasty of the Joseon period in 1392, Buddhism was strongly discriminated against until it was almost completely eradicated, except for a remaining Seon movement. As it now stands, Korean Buddhism consists mostly of the Seon lineage. Seon has a strong relationship with other Mahayana traditions that bear the imprint of Chinese Ch'an teachings, as well as the closely related Japanese Zen. Other sects, such as the Taego, and the newly formed Won, have also attracted sizable followings.

## CHINA

When the Han Dynasty of China extended its power to Central Asia in the first century B.C., trade and cultural ties between China and Central Asia also increased. In this way, the Chinese people learnt about Buddhism so that by the middle of the first century C.E., a community of Chinese Buddhists was already in existence.

As interest in Buddhism grew, there was a great demand for Buddhist texts to be translated from Indian languages into Chinese. This led to the arrival of translators from Central Asia and India. With a growing collection of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, Buddhism became more widely known and a Chinese monastic order was also formed. The first known Chinese monk was said to be Anshigao's disciple.

The earliest translators had some difficulty in finding the exact words to explain Buddhist concepts in Chinese, so they made use of Taoist terms in their translations. As a result, people began to relate Buddhism with the existing Taoist tradition. It was only later on that the Chinese came to understand fully the teachings of the Buddha.

In the middle of the ninth century, Buddhism faced persecution by a Taoist emperor. He decreed the demolition of monasteries, confiscation of temple land, return of monks and nuns to secular life and the melting of metal Buddha images. Although the persecution lasted only for a short time, it marked the end of an era for Buddhism in China. Following the demolition of monasteries and the dispersal of scholarly monks, a number of Chinese schools of Buddhism, including the Tian-tai School, ceased to exist as separate movements. They were absorbed into the Chan and Pure Land schools, which survived. The eventual result was the emergence of a new form of Chinese Buddhist practice in the monastery. Besides practising Chan meditation, Buddhists also recited the name of Amitabha Buddha and studied Buddhist texts. It is this form of Buddhism, which has survived to the present time.

Just as all the Buddhist teachings and practices were combined under one roof in the monasteries, Buddhist lay followers also began to practice Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism simultaneously. Gradually, however, Confucian teachings became dominant in the court, and among the officials who were not in favor of Buddhism.

Buddhism, generally, continued to be a major influence in Chinese religious life. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, there was an attempt to modernize and reform the tradition in order to attract wider support. In the nineteen-sixties, under the People's Republic, Buddhism was suppressed. Many monasteries were closed and monks and nuns returned to lay life. In recent years, a more liberal policy regarding religion has led to a growth of interest in the practice of Buddhism.

## KOREA

When Buddhism was originally introduced to Korea from China in 372, or

about 800 years after the death of the historical Buddha, Shamanism was the indigenous religion. As it was not seen to conflict with the rites of nature worship, it was allowed to blend in with Shamanism. Thus, the mountains that were believed to be the residence of spirits in pre-Buddhist times became the sites of Buddhist temples.

During the sixth and seventh centuries, many Korean monks went to China to study and brought back with them the teachings of the various Chinese schools of Buddhism. Towards the end of the seventh century, the three kingdoms which existed in Korea were unified under the powerful Silla rulers. From then onwards, Buddhism flourished under their royal patronage. Great works of art were created and magnificent monasteries built. Buddhism exerted great influence on the life of the Korean people. In the tenth century, Silla rule ended with the founding of the Koryo Dynasty. Under this new rule, Buddhism reached the height of its importance. With royal support, more monasteries were built and more works of art produced. From this period onwards, there was a revival of Buddhism in Korea. Many Buddhists in Korea have since been actively involved in promoting education and missionary activities. They have founded universities, set up schools in many parts of Korea and established youth groups and lay organizations. Buddhist texts, originally in Chinese translation, are now being retranslated into modern Korean. New monasteries are being built and old ones repaired. Today, Buddhism is again playing an important role in the life of the people.

## JAPAN

Japan discovered Buddhism in the 6th century when Korean monks traveled to the islands together with numerous scriptures and works of art. The Buddhist religion was adopted by the state in the following century. Being geographically at the end of the Silk Road, Japan was able to preserve many aspects of Buddhism at the very time it was disappearing in India, and being suppressed in Central Asia and China.

From the very beginning, the establishment of Buddhism depended on the protection and support of the Japanese rulers. Among these, Prince Shotoku deserves special mention for his great contribution to the early growth and expansion of Buddhism in Japan during the early part of the seventh century. His devotion and royal patronage of Buddhism helped to make it widely known. Many Buddhist temples were built and works of art created. Monks were also sent to China to study. Besides encouraging Japanese monks to read the scriptures, Prince Shotoku lectured and later wrote commentaries on some of these scriptures. His commentaries are said to be the first ever written in Japan and are now kept as national treasures.

The history of Buddhism in Japan can be roughly divided into three periods, namely the Nara period (up to 784), the Heian period (794-1185) and the post-Kamakura period (1185 onwards). Each period saw the introduction of new doctrines and upheavals in existing schools. In modern times, there are three main paths of Buddhism, to which all schools of Japanese Buddhism belong: the Amidist (Pure Land) schools, Nichiren Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism.

Buddhism remains very active in Japan to this day. Around 80,000 Buddhist temples are preserved and regularly restored.

## TIBET

Tibetan Buddhism is the body of religious Buddhist doctrine and institutions characteristic of Tibet, the Himalayan region (including northern Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim and Ladakh), Mongolia, Buryatia, Tuva and Kalmykia

(Russia), and northeastern China (Manchuria: Heilongjiang, Jilin). It is a multifaceted and integrated teaching, naturally implementing methods for all human-condition levels: *Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana*

When Buddhism was introduced into Tibet in the seventh century under King Songtsen Gampo, it was apparently centered in the royal court and did not, at first, put down deep roots. Almost a century passed until it found favor again under King Trisong Detsen, who with the aid of Padmasambhava strengthened its position. But even after that "first diffusion," the new religion lost ground, and it was not until the "second diffusion" of Buddhism in the ninth and tenth centuries that it became firmly and finally established as the majority religion of Tibet.

Buddhism, a comparatively late import to Tibet, was ideologically attractive to the intellectual elite with the innovation of Tantric techniques by which individuals could attain enlightenment within their lifetime. This esoteric doctrine, in large part confined to monastic activities, was made palatable to the general populace in combination with the appropriation of many trappings of the indigenous Pre-Buddhist Tibetan belief system. As a result Tibetan Buddhism amalgamates both elitist and populist traditions to satisfy the different requirements of its two audiences as well as to respond to both religious and mythological dimensions of the Tibetan psyche.

## NEPAL

According to archaeological and historical records, Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was born in Lumbini, Nepal in 563 BCE. After enlightenment at the age of 35 he returned back to the place. His and his disciples' preaching soon spread Buddhism in the surrounding areas.

It was believed that Gautama Buddha visited Nepal several times. It is said that upon the expansion of the Mauryan dynasty into the Terai plains in Nepal, Buddhism was adopted by the ancestors of the Tharu and flourished until the Licchavis came. The Licchavi period saw the flourishing of both Hinduism and Buddhism in Nepal. Excellent examples of Buddhist art of the period are the half-sunken Buddha in Pashupatinath, the sleeping Vishnu in Budhanilkantha, and the statue of Buddha and the various representations of Vishnu in Changu Narayan. After the overthrow of Rana dynasty, Buddhism gradually developed in the country. Theravadins played a great role for the revival campaign. Presently, there are three main Buddhist schools; Tibetan Buddhism, Newar Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism.

## 16.10 Buddhism in the West

During the long course of Buddhist history, Buddhist influences have from time to time reached the western world. However, not until the modern period is there evidence for a serious Buddhist presence in the western world. The movement of Buddhism from Asia to the west that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism was introduced in the United States and other Western countries by large number of immigrants, first from China and Japan but more recently from other countries of SouthEast Asia. Buddhism gained a foothold among a significant number of Western intellectuals and particularly during the 1960s and early 1970s among young people seeking new forms of religious experience and expressions.

### Action and Reflection 16.3

Give an account of the spread of Buddhism outside India

## 16.11 Conclusion

The Buddhist tradition has been more accretive in its doctrine than the other great missionary religions. It has shown an enduring tendency to adapt to local forms, as a result of which one can speak of a transformation of Buddhism in various cultures.

Jainism has been largely confined to India, although the migration of Indians to other, predominantly English speaking countries has spread its practice in many Commonwealth nations and to the United States. Its continuous existence in India for some 2,500 years gives it a unique status as the only Sanskritic non-Hindu religious tradition to have survived in India to the present. In sharp contrast, Buddhism which is widespread in Asia is no longer widely practiced in India. This propagation to foreign countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, China, Nepal, Tibet, Japan etc helped in the exchange of ideas in art, architecture and literature, thus enhancing the cultural heritage of India. Along with Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism remain the most ancient of India's religious traditions still in existence.

## 16.12 Further Reading

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# **Unit 17**

## **Christianity**

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- 17.12 Further Readings

### **Learning Objectives**

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- Describe the genesis of Christianity;
- Explain the message of the Bible;
- Outline the concept of the Trinity; and
- Describe Christianity in India.

### **17.1 Introduction**

In this unit, the genesis of Christianity through historical evidences drawn from the Semitic religions viz. Judaism and Islam has been discussed. Evidences hint that the theological aspect of Christianity focuses upon the conception of divinity as a mission for believers leading them to build-up a society in the temporal world in accordance with the God as the sole authority; hence, section 1.3 elucidates the personality of God as a Creator of Heaven and Earth as well as the lord of history. The concept of God as Father is the focal point of subsection (1.3.1). It demonstrates the creation of world as God's will towards self-revelation for all human kinds in Christian social setup. However, the other aspect of evil that operates to divert the path of good deals in the Christian society has been viewed in section (1.4). Also the emergence of evil through its significant roots, as Christians believe is symbolized by 'Satan' who basically functions for the cause of seducing human-beings into sin, disturbing God's plan of salvation and accusing saints are the main issues of this section. However, the concept of Sin has been clarified in the subsection 1.4.1 of the section (1.4).

The sacred scripture, the Bible and its collections - The Old Testament (39 Books) and the New Testament (27 Books) - have been introduced along with messages which they transmit in a nutshell in the section 1.5 of the unit. Section 1.6 gives a picture of Jesus Christ and his teachings. The

birth of Christ as narrated by Gospel Lucke has been described in the subsection 1.6.1 while 1.62 sub section deals with the message of Jesus Christ. But, during this course of action, Jesus faces resistance which has been elaborated in subsection 1.6.3.

Section 1.7 gives a brief picture of the doctrine of the Church - Here God Himself reveals to the entire mankind a trinity in which the Holy Father, the Holy Son and the Holly Spirit are believed as creatures of universe. The section 1.8 provides the facts relating to the establishment of Christianity, while subsection 1.8.1 gives a note of confrontation with Islam during the spreading of Christianity.

The reformation in the Roman Catholic Church that resulted in the emergence of two great sects viz. Catholicism and Protestantism is analysed in Section 1.9, where as the Christian ways of social life has been presented in subsection 1.9.1.

The spreading of Christianity in India and its significant feature with reference to Indian caste system have been the focal points of the section 1.10 and finally the summary of the whole unit is given.

## 17.2 Genesis of Christianity as a Religion

Christianity is a historical religion as well as one of the major religions of the world. It is an integral part of the Semitic religions such as Judaism and Islam. It locates within the event of human history both the redemption it promises and the revelation to which it lays claim. Christianity developed a very special pattern in emphasizing the transcendental character of its conception of divinity. The God which the Christians inherited from the Hebrews was the Creator-Ruler God (-*Yahweh* which is the God of nature and not God in the nature), sole creator and the governor of the world, which included the human condition generally - the condition of all peoples. The Christian theology focused specially on the conception of a divinely ordained, active mission for man. The book of Genesis (Old Testament - OT) specially mentions that the God created man "in His own image" because He wanted man to "do His will" on earth. That will, in turn, ordained the performance of a great collective task that eventually was believed to consist essentially of the building of a society in the temporal world in accordance with the divine plan. It contrasted very sharply with some of the Oriental religions that motivated "adjustment to" the immanent order of the non-empirical universe (Sills, 1968: 427).

This transcendental - activistic outlook alone, however, does not account for the broad societal impact of Christianity. It has also characterized Judaism and Islam, but neither of these could generate a modern society on its own, whereas this religion furthermore did the development of religious orientation system itself. However, it was "rationalized" and systematized in a manner comparable with the aforementioned Semitic religions (Ibid: 427).

The theme of human limitation or rather imperfection, in sharp contrast with the transcendence and, thus, in some sense, the glory of God, is acutely accented in Judaism and became the basis of the Christian doctrine of sin. Such imperfection, however, was innately relative to the deep theme of the goodness of the divine creation, of which man, "created in God's image" was clearly the highest part of its ideology. It is not the "things of this world" or of the "flesh" which are inherently evil but primarily man's willfulness, his presumptuousness in disobeying the divine commandments and in thinking human being can do nothing without divine guidance (Sills, 1968: 427).

## 17.3 Major Features of the Concept of God

Christianity

Within the specific Christian perception and experience of God, there are some definite characteristic features that stand out: The personality of God - God, as the person, is the "I Am That I Am" (Yahweh) designated in the Book of Exodus 3:14 (OT). The personal consciousness of man awakens in the encounter with God understood as a person: "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11). God as the creator - God is also viewed as creator of heaven and earth. The believer thus maintains, on the one hand, acknowledgement of divine omnipotence as the creative power of God, which also operates in the preservation of the world created by him and, on the other hand, trust in the world, which-despite all its contradictions - is understood as one world created by God according to definite laws, principles, and according to an inner plan. The decisive aspect of creation, however, is that God fashioned man according to His image and made the creation subject to man. This special position of man in the creation, which makes man a co-worker of God in preservation and consummation of the creation, brings a decisively new characteristic into the understanding of God. *God as the Lord of the History* - which is the main feature of the Old Testament understanding of God: God selects for Him a special people, with whom he contracts a special covenant. Through His Law, He binds these "people of God" to Himself; He sets before them a definite goal of salvation - the establishment of His dominion - through His prophets He has His people admonished through proclamation of salvation and calamity whenever they are unfaithful and disobedient to His covenant and promise. *God as a Judge* - The genuinely Israelite belief that God reveals himself in the history of His people leads, with an inner logic, to the proclamation of God as the Lord of world history and as the Judge of the world (*Britannica*, 1975:477).

### The Specific concept of God as Father

What is decisively new in the Christian, New Testament (NT) faith in God lies in the fact that this faith is so closely bound up with the person, teaching, and work of Jesus Christ that it is difficult to draw boundaries between theology and Christology (doctrines of Christ). Jesus himself embraced the God of the Hebrew patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), but he also understood himself as the fulfiller of the promise of the Messiah-son of man, who is bringer of the kingdom of God. The religious experience that forms the basis of the Messianic self-understanding of Jesus is the recognition that the Messiah - son of man is the son of God.

The special relationship of Jesus to God is expressed through his designation of God as Father. In prayers Jesus used the Aramaic word *abba* (father) for god, which is otherwise unusual in religious discourse in Judaism. This Father-Son relationship became a prototype for the relationship of the Christian to his God. Appeal to the sonship of God played a crucial role in the development of Jesus Christ's messianic self-understanding. According to the account of Jesus' baptism, Jesus understood his sonship when a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Faith in the Son also brought about an oneness with the Father. The Son became the mediator of the glory of the Father to those who believe in Him. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught his disciples to address God as "Our Father." The Father- God of Jesus after His death and resurrection becomes, for his disciples, the God and the Father of Lord Jesus Christ, who revealed his love through sacrifice of his Son who was sent to the world. The faithful-believer Christian can thus become the son of God.

The God of the Bible is the God of revelation; on His initiative, He presses toward revelation. The creation of the world is viewed as an expression of God's will towards self-revelation for all human beings. The Biblical understanding of God, however, was based upon the idea of the freedom of the Creator, Sustainer, and Judge of the world (*Ibid*: 478).

## 17.4 The Emergence of Evil

In the Bible, both the Old as well as the New Testaments, Satan (the devil/angel of darkness) appears as the representative of Evil. Satan represents the demonic side of the divine wrath. Only in post-biblical Judaism does the devil become adversary of God, the prince of angels, who was created by God and was placed as the head of the angelic hosts, and who enticed some of the angels into revolt against God. In punishment for his rebellion, He was cast from heaven together with his mutinous entourage, which was transferred into demons. As ruler over the fallen angels, he henceforth continues the struggle against the kingdom of God in a three fold function: the Satan seeks to seduce human beings into sin; he tries to disrupt God's plan for salvation; and he appears before God as the slanderer and the accuser of the saints, so as to reduce the number of those chosen for the kingdom of God. Even in the New Testament, the feature of an anti-Godly power is clearly prominent in the figures of the devil, Satan or Belial and Beelzebub - the "enemy." He is the accuser, the evil one, the tempter, the old snake, the great dragon, the prince of this world, and the god of this world, who seeks to hinder the establishment of God's dominion (*Britannica*, 1975:479).

### Concept of Sin

Although the man was made by God in a state of holiness (from the very dawn of history). Yet he abused his liberty at the urging of personified Evil. Man set himself against god and sought to find fulfillment apart from God. Chapters one and two of the Book of Genesis (OT) tell the story of creation by God. God created all things (in the whole world) including man and woman and saw that they were good. But into this good world entered Sin. In the third chapter of Genesis, the man Adam rejects God and tries to become His equal. As a result of this original sin, the man feels alienated from God. He hides, when the God (creator) confronts him. Adam blames his woman companion Eve for his sin, and she in turn blames the serpent (Satan) for tempting them to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree of the Paradise. With disobedience, the man's guilt has distorted all his relationships. Sin has turned life into a harsh burden. The book of Genesis further depicts the escalation of sin in the world, rippling out from Adam's original sin. According to Genesis, a world of beauty was deformed by sin. The ongoing result has been division, pain, bloodshed, loneliness and death. As Saint Paul declared in the letter to the Romans (5:12), "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned."

## 17.5 The Bible: Its Books and Its Message

Sacred Scripture, the Bible, is a collection of books. The Old Testament of the Bible was originally written in Hebrew/Aramaic and is consisted of 39 books that were written approximately between the years 900 B.C. and 160 B.C. that is before the advent of Christ. Later they were translated by the Jews themselves into Greek (with seven new books added). The New Testament of the Bible was written wholly in Greek. The 27 books of the New Testament were written approximately between the years A.D.40 and A.D. 140.

The Old Testament collection is made up of historical books, didactic (teaching) books, Prophetic books (containing the inspired words of Prophets, people who experienced God in special ways and were his authentic spokesmen). In brief, the Old Testament books are records of the experience the Israelite people had of Yahweh, "the God of their fathers." As a whole, these books reveal Israel's insight into the personal reality of the one God, Yahweh, who acts in the human history guiding it with plan and purpose.

#### **Box 17.1 The Ten Commandments**

In the Old Testament, God gives Ten Commandments to His people through Prophet Moses as the Commandments of God. They are as follows: "You shall honour no other god but me. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your God. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Honour your father and your mother. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods" (Exodus 20: 3-17; Deuteronomy 5:7-21).

The New Testament books, written originally in Greek, are made up of Gospels (which means proclamation of Good News) and Epistles (letters which were written in each case to meet the particular needs of the early Christian communities by the some disciples of Jesus). First, in the order in which they appear in Bible, are the Gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. The first Gospels are called *synoptic* (from the Greek *synoptikos*, "seeing the whole together") because they tell much the same life story of Jesus in much the same way. The fourth Gospel which is called as Gospel of John is followed by Acts of the Apostles (Formation of early Christian Communities).

The final book of the New Testament is the book of Revelation, a message of hope for the persecuted Christians, promising Christ's ultimate triumph in history. The basic theme of the New Testament is Jesus Christ. Each book reveals a different side of Jesus' mystery. The four Gospels record the words and deeds of Jesus as they were remembered and handed down in the early generation of the Church. They also specifically mention the story of Jesus' Passion and death, and what death means in the light of his Resurrection. In a sense, the Gospels began with the resurrection; Jesus' teaching and the events in his life made sense to early Christian only after his Resurrection. The Gospels reflect the shared faith of the first Christians in the Lord Jesus who is risen and now continues to dwell among us.

## **17.6 Jesus Christ and His Teachings**

In the light of the New Testament, the significance of the person of Jesus is specified and seen as "Christ". However, beside this title, there are additional titles such as Son of Man, Son of God, Word of God (Logos), and Savior - given in an effort to account for that significance, for within the events of Jesus' human life the God of Israel and creator of the world had been disclosed (Pelikan, 1987:355).

### **Birth of Jesus Christ**

The initial two chapters of the Gospel of Luke narrate regarding the nativity of Christ. God sent his messenger angel Gabriel to a town of Galilee called Nazareth to a young girl named Mary. She was betrothed to a man of David's lineage; his name was Joseph. The angel Gabriel said to her that the Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the most high

will overshadow you. Thus this holy offspring of yours shall be known as the son of God, and you shall call him Jesus. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus was a carpenter in the village of Nazareth. He was a deeply religious and an ever-faithful head and protector of the family.

Just before the birth of Jesus, the Roman emperor had decreed a census throughout the empire. According to the order, all were to go to the village of their family's origin to register their names, which meant for Joseph and his spouse Mary to go to Bethlehem (town of David). While they were still there, that time came for her delivery. She brought forth a son, her first-born, whom she wrapped in his swaddling clothes, and laid in a feeding-trough for animals, because there was no room for them in the inn. On the birth of Jesus, the shepherds were given the message by a multitude of angels: "Do not be afraid; behold, I bring you good news of great rejoicing for the whole people. This day in the city of David, a Saviour has been born for you, the Lord Christ Himself. This is the sign by which you are to know Him; you will find a Child still in swaddling-clothes, lying in a feeding-trough" (Luke 2: 10-12). Besides the shepherds three learned men (magi) from the neighbouring countries were led by a star to Bethlehem. When they found the child there with his mother Mary, they fell down to worship him. They offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Travers-Ball, 1962:15-6).

### **Jesus Christ and His Message**

Jesus' teaching sought to return to the core of the Law's purpose and to reduce the burden of their interpretive tradition, the fence around the Law. He redrew the boundaries of the pure and impure in a way that offended some Jews and encouraged others. He preached the message of divine compassion and mercy, the acceptance of which spelled salvation and rejection of which meant spiritual disaster. One of the characteristics of his preaching was the Parable. A Parable, as told by Jesus, portrayed a kind of world-reversal and, as the parables unfolded, the reactions to it revealed the hearts of those listening to it. In their original settings, the parables were remarkably provocative ways of speaking about what the in-breaking reign of God looked like when expressed in thoroughly human terms. Besides the ten commandments of God, Jesus summarized the whole Law into God's two great commandments: "You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,... You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12: 30-31).

Jesus called men and women to discipleship, a different way of acting from most Jewish teachers, who expected prospective students to take the initiative. The people most resistant to his teaching were those "good" fellow Jews who sought to let their righteousness protect them from the new grace that Jesus offered. People who were broken hearted in their guilt and those who were like "children" seemed most open to the gift of divine acceptance he preached. He related publicly to women in ways that did not respect the traditional boundaries of his days, thus implying that service of God's reign, as it was breaking in through Jesus' ministry, was transforming the customary lines of distinction. Jesus gathered about himself a community of disciples. An inner core was called the twelve Apostles.

#### **Reflection and Action 17.1**

Meet a Christian priest and ask him about Jesus and his Message. Write down what you learn from him in your notebook and discuss it with other students at your study centre.

Jesus told his disciples that he has come to this world to fulfill the law and not to destroy the age-old law. Besides the Ten Commandments, he gave to his disciples the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are a summary of the difficulties to be overcome by his faithful followers and the rewards that will be theirs if they are loyal in their following. The Beatitudes are blessed and the poor in spirit; the reign of God is theirs. Blessed are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled. Blessed are the lowly; they shall inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for holiness; they shall have their fill. Blessed are those who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs. Blessed are the single-hearted; they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those persecuted for holiness' sake; the reign of God is theirs (Mathew 5:3-10).

### **Confrontation with Authority**

During Jesus' ministry, he made some enemies. The Gospels portray the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and elders as his chief opponents. The increasingly excited crowds Jesus drew made his opponents fear that he was another messianic pretender. And Jesus' provocative act of symbolically interrupting the normal activity of the Temple would have profoundly concerned the priests in their delicate relationship with the Romans. They would not have had a difficult time persuading some Roman officials that Jesus posed a grave danger to the civil-religious "peace."

The actual trial of Jesus is difficult to reconstruct historically, but the sign over the cross suggests that he was executed by the Romans as a messianic pretender. The mode of execution was reserved in those times for slaves and for those who violated the "pax romana," the religio-political hegemony of the Romans. The final legal responsibility for Jesus' death on a cross lay with the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Before Jesus' crucifixion he had Last Supper (Passover meal) with his twelve disciples in an upper room. Thereafter, one of his disciples named Judas Iscariot betrayed him and sold him for thirty silver pieces to the Jewish authority (McDermott, 1997:453).

The stories of the Last Supper and the Agony in the Garden give expression to the freedom with which Jesus went to his death as a service of God and people in full continuity with his ministry. Soon after Jesus' subhuman death on a cross (ca. A.D. 30), he was buried and several events occurred. Some of Jesus' disciples visited his tomb and it was discovered empty (resurrection had taken place). Thereafter the disciples reported his appearances on several occasions. Jesus appears on his own initiative to his disciples and some other people who knew him before his death, he offered them companionship. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus sends them on a mission - "Go to the ends of the world and preach the Good News to all people and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." The disciples went on preaching that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah. The apostle Paul was responsible for the transformation of Christianity from a Jewish sect to a gentile movement by the end of the first century of the Common Era. The importance of this change for Christian history is impossible to exaggerate. Jesus had been born in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire, but now his followers took upon themselves the assignment of challenging that empire and eventually conquering it in the name of Jesus. The opposition between empire and the church sometimes during the second and third centuries took the form of persecution and martyrdom (Ibid: 450-1).

## **17.7 The Holy Trinity**

The Trinity of God is defined by the Church as the belief that in God are

three persons who subsist in one nature. The trinity of persons within the unity of nature is defined in terms of "person" and "nature" which are Greek philosophical terms; actually the terms do not appear in the Bible. The ultimate affirmation of the Trinity of persons and unity of nature was declared by the Church to be the only correct way in which these terms could be used (McKenzie, 1984:899).

The Christians believe in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity that is a kind of a mystery of rational monotheism. This doctrine has its ultimate foundation in the special religious experience of the early Christian communities, but this basis of experience is older than the formation of the doctrine of Trinity. It consists of the fact that God comes to meet His people in a threefold figure: God the Father - who reveals himself in the Old Testament; as Creator, Lord of the history of salvation and Judge. The second figure of the Trinity is God the Son - as the Lord who in the figure of Jesus Christ, who came to live in the midst of human beings, who suffered, died on the cross and Resurrected from the dead and Christ will come again to this world to Judge the living and the dead. The Third figure of the Holy Trinity is God the Holy Spirit - to whom the faithful experience as the source of new life, healer and the miraculous potency of the kingdom of God. In the doctrine of the Holy Trinity the formal understanding of the oneness of God as well as the sameness of essence of the son and the Holy Spirit is maintained ("one substance - three Persons"). It is stated in short that the oneness of God and His self-revelation in the figure of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - without rationalizing the mystery itself (Britannica, 1975:485-6).

## 17.8 The Official Establishment of Christianity

Almost more than two centuries, the Early Christian communities were persecuted on account of their faith. In year A.D. 64, when the emperor Nero set fire to Rome to destroy it so that he could rebuild the city to his own tastes, Nero made the Christians a scapegoat upon whom to divert public fury. The Christians were targeted by many Romans because they refused to acknowledge the gods of Rome and thus they were burnt alive in the fire.

### Box 17.2 The Flaming Cross

The persecution of Early Christians continued under Galerius in the East and Constantius in the west until A.D. 311. Galerius wearily decreed the toleration of Christianity in his realm. In A.D. 312 Constantius' son, Constantine, defeated Maxentius, the son of an earlier Augustus of the West, in the battle of the Milvian Bridge near Rome, to secure his own succession in the West.

It was reported that Constantine prayed before the battle to the "supreme god" in an effort to ward off Maxentius' magical powers. He was rewarded with the vision of a flaming cross in the mid-day sky, bearing the inscription *In hoc signo vinces* ("In this sign you shall conquer").

Whatever the realities of vision and dream, the historical fact is that Constantine won the battle and the western throne, and he attributed his victory to the Christian God. In A.D. 313, he and Licinius, his counterpart in the East, agreed on an edict Promulgating universal religious tolerance. Constantine seems to have viewed Christianity as a potential unifying force in the empire, but there were ambiguities in his own attitude. Although he called himself a Christian, he was baptized only in A.D. 337, on Pentecost Sunday, a little more than 300 years after the Holy Spirit's descent upon the Apostles during the fateful Pentecost in Jerusalem.

Constantine's acceptance of Christianity and the eventual establishment of it as the official faith of the Roman empire is rightly seen as the most potential event-for good or ill or some combination of the two - in all Christian history: conversely, "the end of Constantinian era" (Ward, 2002:303).

### Confrontation with Islam

The missionaries who brought the gospel to various tribes, people and even the barbarians in their own way and with it they gave them their culture too. Each in its own way, both Eastern and western Christendom were compelled, from the seventh century onward, to come to terms with the reality of Islam. During the one hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632ce, the geographical spread of Islam was both more rapid and more effective than that of Christianity had been during its first several centuries. Several of the major centres of the Eastern churches - Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem itself - had a Muslim ruled government, although a large Christian population was able to practice its faith under varying degrees of pressure (Pelikan, 1987:351).

## 17.9 Reformation in the Church

Since the inception of the church many reform movements took place in order to rescue the church in times of crisis-until, through Martin Luther (1483-1546) and the reformation, a crisis arose in which the primary impetus for reform was to express itself not through monasticism or the papacy, but against both monasticism and the papacy (Luther, too, was originally a monk). Already in various late medieval reformations, such as those of the 'Spiritual' Franciscans and the Hussites, there was the sense that Christendom could be neither one nor holy nor catholic nor apostolic unless it had replaced the secularized and corrupt authority of bishop of Rome (Pope) with the authenticity of word of God (Bible), for which some looked to the church council while others put their confidence in the recovery of the message of the Bible. That sense finally found its voice in the programme of the protestant reformers. The reformers alienated themselves from the hierachal structure of the Mother church as well as teaching of the church of their time and they were obliged to look or rather invent for alternative structures and teaching of their own (Ibid:351-2).

The principal difference, at least as seen both by the protestant reformers and by their Roman Catholic adversaries, lay in the area of religious authority: not the church or its tradition, not the Papacy or a church council, but the Bible alone, was to be the norm that determined what Christians were to believe and how they were to live.

In this reformation particularly at the religious level the crucial development was done by the reformer(s) that is the upgrading of the Christian laity and granting them a new role in the church. This was effected by ending the individual dependence on the sacerdotal (priestly) mediation. The individual soul stood in *immediate* relation to God through Christ. With respect to the ancient triad of functions the effect was to throw emphasis strongly away from the institutional forms of the "cure of the soul" and of "casuistry." It opened the door to an altogether new emphasis on "conscience" which emerged particularly in the Calvinistic branch once the more subjective concerns of Lutheranism had given way to concern with objective activism in secular callings. Although it is true that the basic status 'differential' was eliminated, this did not imply any lowering in the evaluation of the clergy or of the system, within which statuses had been "equalized" (Parsons, 1968:436).

Many of the corruptions that had acted as tinder for the Reformation received the careful attention in the council of Trent (1545-1564), with the result that the Roman Catholicism and the Papacy emerged from the crisis of the Reformation diminished in size but chastened and strengthened in spirit. The historical coincidence of the discovery of the new world and the protestant reformation, which both protestants and Roman Catholics interpreted as providential, enabled Roman catholic missionaries to recoup in North and South America the losses in prestige and membership caused by the reformation (Pelikan, 1987:352).

### The Christian Ways of Social Life

As a system of love - and love is the "greatest" and above all according to the formula of Saint Paul, Christianity presents itself to its hearer as a way of life. The Christian way of life as love is conventionally seen as finding its ultimate fulfillment in the church as the loving community of believers set apart from the world. But alongside that strain in the Christian tradition, there always stands a concern and a love for the entire world (Ibid: 361). At the Last Supper Jesus gives a new commandment to his disciples, "Love one another as I have loved you." And along with this new commandment, he sets an example of service by washing the feet of his disciples. It is the fundamental duty of each and every Christian to exhibit one's faith by imparting service to the poor and the downtrodden because Jesus has pronounced: "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters (a weaker section of the society) you have done it to me."

#### Action and Reflection 17.2

Meet members of the Christian community and ask them about their beliefs. Make a note in your note book about your findings.

## 17.10 Christianity in India

The first Prime Minister of India, Pandit J. Nehru, has once said that if anyone who says that the Christianity came to India with the colonial rule then they do not know the history of India. Before the Gospel could spread in Europe, one of the Apostles (out of twelve) of Jesus named Thomas (A.D. 45), came to south India to spread the Gospel. According to the traditions, Thomas founded seven churches in South India, where he was martyred. The early Christian community of India was small in number and had very limited influence over the rest of the existing religious sects.

In the sixteenth century, with the advent of colonial rule, the second phase of missionary activity took place. The mass conversion took place in various parts (coastal areas) of India where the Portuguese, Dutch and French had their colonial rule. In some places newly converted Christians were segregated from the local community and imposed upon them traits of western culture. A little over a century ago, the Christianity came to NEFA, where many tribals accepted the new faith. Today in some north-eastern States, Christianity is the major religion.

On commencement of the nineteenth century, the British India faced a severe draught. A large population of Dalits and the tribals were prey to the starvation and the outbreak of the epidemic. In this situation the missionaries erected the asylums for the needy and the sick to provide round the clock medical assistance and by opening community kitchen, a great number of ravenous were given a daily square meal. During this time, many tribals and Dalits accepted the Christian faith. However, in another instance, many lower castes (*Shudra* or *Atishudra*) were forced to accept the Christianity due to the atrocities done to them by the upper

castes - for example, the mass conversion of Nadar community (*Shanas*) of Tamil Nadu.

Christianity

Today in India, the population of Christians is less than three percent but their contribution to the Indian society is immense. The Christians run almost many educational institutes as well as a number of hospitals equipped with medical facilities for the poor and the needy people of this country.

Christianity is an egalitarian religion which does not speak of inequality ideologically. Nevertheless, the Indian case of Christianity appears to be a peculiar one, as Indian Christians due to the conversion from different Hindu castes, seem to have retained the generations' old caste structure within their social setup. Various movements for the recognition of 'backward' class status within Christians are the sheer reflection of such an acceptance. In this connection, the anthropologists and sociologists seem to be agreed that Indian Christians are greatly influenced by the ideology and values of Hinduism, and particularly as being weaken against the pervasive influence of caste. For instance, Dumont treats the adherence values of monotheistic religion with egalitarian tendencies which are weaker than the fundamental values on which the caste system rests (1972: 251). Further, he believes that the influences of Hinduism on Indian Christians are contributing to the existence of caste like elements among them (Ibid, 83-84). A number of studies clearly indicate that the social way of life of Indian Christians is very much influenced by caste-like structure. Here Fuller (1976: 65) narrates that the egalitarianism of Christianity had marginal impact on the Hindu way of life.

## 17.11 Conclusion

Christianity came into existence from Judaism because Jesus was a Jew by birth. And Jesus himself said: "I have come to fulfill the Law-Torha and not to destroy the Law." Jesus in his teaching stressed on love for God, the Father, as well as love for the neighbours.

While teaching the law of love he had confrontation with established religious authorities who crucified him on the cross. After his death, he resurrected himself from death and appeared to his disciples. After descending of the Holy Spirit, the disciples went on spreading the Gospel of Christ. The early Christian community faced persecution for about two centuries from the Roman Empire.

In the seventh century, the Christianity was encountered with the new emerging religion of Islam. And in the sixteenth century, a Man called Martin Luther brought first-major reformation in the Church. Later on, this was named as Protestantism. With this reformation, a new kind of religious ethic was emerged in the Christian Church and Papacy tradition. The Church preaching were replaced by extra emphasis on the teaching of the Bible and in this context a new interpretation of worldly life was commenced within the Christianity which later turned into Calvinism, resulting in modernism and capitalism in the society (Weber, 1930).

## 17.12 Further Reading

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# **Unit 18**

## **Islam**

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### **Contents**

- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Genesis of Islam
- 18.3 Teaching of Islam
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- 18.5 Prophet Mohammad
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### **Learning Objectives**

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- describe the genesis of Islam;
- outline the teaching of Islam;
- delineate the life of prophet Mohammed; and
- Provide some aspects of Islam in India.

### **18.1 Introduction**

In this unit, the genesis of Islam as historical phenomena has been discussed while doing so, social and cultural treatments have been given so that sociological perspective can be understood. Even some lights are thrown to clarify the sectarian divisions in Islam. The teaching of Islam bounds the individuals cutting across the national and a racial boundary forming the equalitarian society has been elucidated in section 1.3. The concept of Islam and law which have been drawn from the words and deeds of prophet Mohammad constituting the normative customs of the Muslims regarding to rituals have been analysed in section 1.4. Section 1.5 of this unit gives a detailed note relating to the Prophet Mohammad's birth and work as well as the conditions under which he extended Islam as religion. However, sub section 1.5.1 of this section gives a sketchy description of the spread of Islam beyond its birthplace. The section 1.6 presents a brief account of the metaphysics of Islam clarifying it through God, revelation, spiritual realm, humanity, final judgment which have appeared in respective subsections (1.6.1), (1.6.2), (1.6.3), (1.6.4), (1.6.5) of the section 1.6. However, the situation of Islam in India has appeared in section 1.7 and finally the summary of the unit is given.

### **18.2 Genesis of Islam**

Islam is extensively applied as a term for those who have faith that Koran is the true word of Allah (God), transmitted to the human kind as a revelation through his messenger, Prophet Mohammad. Earlier, the term was used in scanty to submission which is commonly bracketed with belief *Iman*. The believer of this faith is a Muslim. However, the term "Islamic"

denotes social as well as cultural settings of the faith consisting of Muslims' theology and Islamic Law.

Islam as a historical phenomena, conceived in Arabia in the early stage of the seventh century. Regarding the genesis of Islam, two focal elements must be separated from each other in religious backdrop, namely; the purely Arab background and the intermingling elements of Christianity and Judaism (Megher, Paul K, 1979).

With a prosperous economy in South West Arabia there has existed a civilization (Sabian era). At the beginning, the Sabian religion was a Trinitarian star cult, which in the fourth century had been replaced by a monotheistic cult - Al Rahman denoting mercifulness. However, in due course, in the sixth century, the elements of Judaism and Christianity were accepted by Al. Rahman. Nevertheless, this tradition of adaptation could not be continued for long because the Meccans had never dealt with them nicely due to the Judo-Christian ideas.

During the revelation of the Koran, it was clarified that the primary background of Islam is Arab rather than Judo-Christian. Nevertheless, the latter elements have had their strong impact on Islam.

The sectarian division in Islam can be observed on the basis of succession after the death of Prophet Mohammad. The sect which holds that succession belongs to *Qurayash*, the Prophet's own tribe is *Sunnites*. And those believe that succession belongs to *Imam* are the *Shiates*. However, *Sunni* Caliphas and *Shiate Imams* have never accepted the authority of each other. Apart from this division of power and privilege, there is no centrally organized religious authority in Islam. Perhaps, this is the sole factor that the social organization of Islamic Society varies significantly from society to society in classical Vs. local. For instance, in the localities of Africa and far east, Islam had absorbed the pagan elements and in India the elements of caste system representing the amalgamous feature of classical and local elements.

### 18.3 Teaching of Islam

The primary religious obligations of Islam are termed as "pillars of Islam". They are imperative upon every believer. They are: (1) to pronounce the testimony *shahadat*; "there is no other god then Allah (God) and Mohammad is the one Apostle of God; it is more than enough to bear this testimony to make one totally a Muslim; (2) the ritual prayer *Namaz salat*; which is performed five times a day after certain intervals (at dawn; noon; after noon; sun down; sun set and late evening) facing towards Mecca. *Namaz* is an individual's obligation which may be offered at any place. However, it is a must, to save noon of every Friday when the believers are obligated to attend public services in the mosque. Hence, collective offering of Friday's *Namaz* is desirable; (3) Almsgiving *Zakat* is a fixed percentage, varying according to the nature and value of goods possessed by an individual as well as fixed by the several Islamic schools; (4) One month's fast during the month of *Ramazan*; and (5) To make the pilgrimage *Hajj* to Mecca at least once in one's whole life span. It is obligatory for those who are capable economically and physically (Robinson 1998: 322).

### 18.4 Concept of Islam and Law

Apart from these, Islam recognizes the basic validity of Judaism and Christianity and conceives Mohammad as "the seal of prophets." The above recognition itself indicates conformity with the teaching of the Koran, since Prophet Mohammad was sent almost with the same message

as that of Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus (Who held to be also messengers of God *Rasul*) to reaffirm the message against distortion and innovation that had crept into them and to bring the essential message to its final and perfect version. Since the pivotal stress of Islam is the Koran and a Prophet, hence the Koran has relatively more significance in Islam rather than the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. It is treated by the orthodox Muslims to be "verbatim" and uncreated "speech of God." Because of the expressive command that the language has right from the beginning, it is believed to be a peculiar miracle that recognises the divine genesis of Prophet Mohammad's mission, preaching and teaching. His orthodox doctrines adhere notably to the text of the Koran and their recitation is the most common form of popular devotion. Although all matters pertaining to religion are not set forth explicitly in the Koran, yet the Prophet is considered to be the source and the model. His actions and words are the norms and references for the individuals and for the community which jointly constitute the *Sunna* that are embodied in the written form of traditions (*Hadith*). Although they are not very firmly considered revealed, yet they have canonical authority over the Islamic religion. In all, the formal religious law in Islam rests on the Koran and *Sunna*.

#### Action and Reflection 18.1

Talk to some Mohammedans about Islam. How do they describe the pillars of Islam. Make a note of what they say in your notebook.

A vital fact must be taken into account here that the nature of law in Islamic society lies in the legal theory of God's creation, human needs and political expediency. In such an evolutionary process of civilized life, the notions of anthropology, sociology and social justice are seemed to be secondary. Islamic society rests on the words of God, while edifice of practices is constructed by human knowledge and reasoning in the sense that *fiqh* is founded upon *Manqul* (revealed notions) that is Koran as well as *Sunna* (*Sunna* is created by human logic in the forms of *ijma* and *qiyyas*). This situation indicates that the source of law and its purpose is different. The ultimate purpose of Islamic society is to seek closeness (*qurba*) to the Diving Being by conforming to His code, as this is the doctrine of duties and obligations of Islam. The established fact is that there is nothing to be accepted against the will of God. Such tendency is further extended and strengthened by the notion that without good deeds, the approval of Allah is not possible for salvation i.e. Divine Grace.

An evaluation concerning the definition of law in Islam may give some insights regarding the differences. Abu Hanif defines: that "the law is the soul's cognizance of its rights and obligations." The definition itself hints the subjective ingredients in the concept of *fiqh* as well in the pretext of conscience where the conscience is of an individual, which is a final arbiter. Hence, the individual in every action and dealing has to ask himself/herself "it is wrong or right". Considering this tendency, the Islamic terminology, of course, becomes significant but it has its own history (Fyze, 1981:29). However, such a situation may be understood by taking into account *sharia* or *fiqh*. Such treatment hints that the Islamic Law (*fiqh*) is universally defined where as the individuals' rights and obligations are abstracted from the Holy Koran and *Sunna* or deduced from both on the basis of knowledge (interpretation). Nevertheless, these act as core values in Islamic society and have their greater impact on the ritual, family and inheritance on one side while on the other, they jointly constitute the equalitarian social structure. Therefore, the world-view of Islamic society is non-hierarchical, monotheistic as well as historical in ethos, although, the historical ethos of traditions is the dominant authority in all

revealed religions, (Hodgson, 1960). Nonetheless, it is more striking in Islam. The significance of history in various religious faiths reveal that for the Christian history is significant and decisive but for Muslim history is decisive but not final (Smith 1957:21). Hence, the role of history to the revealed traditions has significantly contributed worldview of Islam as a holistic and socio-centric cultural oriented religion. Ideologically, the Islam does not allow any institutionalized role for priest, hence, *Ulema* not at all priests. The nature of such ideological orientation leads no clergy in Islam, i.e., any Muslim may lead a congregation in prayer offering (Smith, 1963: 38). The above situation suggests that in ideal typical form, Islam has perfect foundation of universal ideology in its conception of social order than any other religion. Sociologically speaking, the principle of universalism in the revealed tradition of Islam is distinct from hierarchism but hierarchism has no place in ideology.

#### Box 18.1 Holism and Hierarchy

The distinctive nature of such holism as well as much stress on the historicity of tradition have generated the specificity and exclusiveness in Islam. Moreover, the universalism is founded on the unity of believers, *Umma*, the collectivity of the Muslim. Such principle oriented unity passes cutting across the boundaries of nations. The unity, however, is abstracted from the conformity of the believers to the religio-ethical codes and principles embodied in the Koran and/or *Sunna*, the *Hadia* (many traditions), and the *Shariya* (legal codebook of Islam). The conception of nation in the sense of territory has no place in Koran, as the Koran does not mention a number of Islamic states but does mention the *millat* (one nation of believers). The holistic principle that is embodied in the notions of *umma* and *millat* carry on the egalitarian values. However, equality is meaningful within the immutable and persisting contexts of the principles of holism and hierarchy.

## 18.5 Prophet Mohammad

Mecca was invaded by Yemen in 570 AD, however, the invasion was not successful due to the army as the army was equipped with elephants. It was known as the era of elephant in the history. In the same year, Prophet Mohammed was born in a small clan of *Quraish* tribe. His father's name was Abdullah. Perhaps, the word 'Allah' has come from the name of Mohammad's father. Allah as the God might be possible, because of the actual rejection of polytheism by Mohammad's father. However, its influence on Mohammad is not known as he died before the birth of Mohammad. This critical situation was further extended as his mother died when he was about six year old leaving him an orphan. Mohammad's father's brother was a merchant operating a caravan and he looked after him. Prophet Mohammad also adopted the traditional occupation of the family and became a merchant. As a young man, he was appointed by a rich widow named Khadija to operate her trade through caravans. However, at the age of 25, Mohammad married her leading a happy family life. The life of prophet indicates that being a successful businessman and family man, he became a Prophet.

In 610 AD, at the age of 40, he began to have visions often in a cave on a nearby hillside of Mecca where he used to spend many hours in communication with Allah. Before revelation, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told "you that are wrapped up in your vestments, arise," and give him further warning, "magnify your lord, cleanse your garments and keep away from all pollution."

Mohammed fled from such experiences to hide himself. But his wife Khadija encouraged him to listen to the revelations which came to him often. Also, his wife's cousin named Waragah, was a Christian by faith and motivated him much. Ultimately, Mohammad sensed that he was receiving messages from Allah. He started to transmit them to the Meccans. The message stressed on the acceptance of only one God, that the Mohammad is His messenger, that worship of idol and killing of girl children is totally forbidden, and that one must be prepared for the judgment, '*Kayamat*' .

Initially, a few after listening him, accepted Mohammad as a Prophet and embraced Islam and became Muslims. When Mohammad initiated preaching against the generations old practices of idols worship in Kabah many people of Mecca resisted, thus they became his opponents. Even economic disparities had also been condemned by the prophet. However, next 10 years were the span in which Islam grew gradually but with it, tension also increased to such an extent that it was difficult to sustain the life of the Muslims without the support of their clan-members against the sporadic violence. During that social setting, it was almost impossible to sustain with out the support of the clan members as there was nothing like formal law and order in the state. At one instance, a non-Muslim master attempted to torture to his Muslim slave of black race called Bilal. Bilal was forced to lie down on ground and heavy stones were piled on his chest to tarnish. But he was emancipated by a Muslim who purchased him from his old master. Besides many such kind of instances, the expansion of Islam was initiated in 615 AD, when some followers of Islam were sent by Mohammad to Abyssinia for the propagation of faith.

Mohammad's uncle who was looking after him from his childhood protected him from an assault before he died in 619 AD. So much so, that Mohammad also lost his wife in the same year. These incidents led to a critical situation for him, thus he marched about 375 kilometres to the north in a city of Yathrib where he was given the status of Chieftain of the city's tribes. However, the situation of Mecca arose so worse that Mohammad in association with two hundred followers migrated to town called Medina in 622. This, in Islamic history is called "*hijarat*" and it marks the beginning of Islam as a religion. Since that the Islamic calendar counting started which is popularly known as '*hijri*' in Islamic terminology.

In Medina, Mohammad was received by the people with respect as he was made town's head. Here, he started to implement the social changes that he received through the revelations. Hence, Mohammad had the status of a prophet as well as statesman. This makes the distinction between Mohammad and other Prophets as they were only prophets:

#### Action and Reflection 18.2

Read section 18.5 on the life of Mohammed. Write down what strikes you as its most important aspects in your notebook.

During those days Medina was an agricultural town comprising of *Pagans* who embraced Islam and Jewish who did not, leading distrusts and differences between the two. Consequently, Jews were expelled from the town.

On the account of trade, Medina and Mecca had antagonistic relation. Meccans went for war against Medina. Mohammad then became a general as well. War was continued till seven years sporadically, and it was associated with Muslims' victories as well as defeats. Medina was taken into possession for two weeks by the Meccans. By that time, many tribes had already embraced Islam. Hence, Mohammad succeeded in acquiring more allies leading surrender of Meccans to the Muslim army in 630 AD

and they also embraced Islamic faith. Mecca, thus, got the status of centre of Islamic Arabia. Mohammad cleansed the Kabah from its idol and restored it for the worship of Allah and the pilgrimage of Muslims as well. However, within short span of two years, the whole of Arabia accepted Prophet Mohammad as their leader and embraced Islam. On 8<sup>th</sup> of June 633 AD at the age of 65, Prophet Mohammad left the world.

### **Spread of Islam**

Within a century, after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the power of Islam had spread far beyond the Arabian peninsula extending from the Atlantic coasts of Spain and North Africa eastward as far as Ferghana in Transoxiana (Now in Uzbekistan) and across the Indus river into Sindh (Presently Pakistan). Currently, Islam is a predominant religion throughout North Africa, in the Middle East, the Sudan, Iran, the Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey Tadzhitan as well as in Kirgiz in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sinkiang province of China. Whereas in Southeast ward into the Malay Peninsula of Archipelago in Malaysia, Sumatra, Java and Borneo etc. However, there are considerable minorities of Muslims in Albania, India and Southern Philippines, Somalia, Mozambique, Madagascar, Nigeria and Islam's influence is expanding rapidly in both east and west Africa even. (Meyagher, 1979).

## **18.6 Metaphysics in Islam**

Apart from the five pillars, Islam has very deep understanding about the nature of every thing that exists in the universe. But the most important concerns of Islamic metaphysics are God, Prophet, Revelation and Religion; the spiritual worlds; the human beings and their ultimate goals for existence and, the last day of Judgment that they will have to face.

### **God**

Islam is such a religion that it stresses the oneness of God (*Twhid*). The *Shahada* begins with "there is no god but Allah", constituting monotheism as a basic element of Muslim belief. Mohammad who came from polytheistic society, not only removed their idols, but also satisfied those people that the idols were powerless and helpless. That is why Islam interdicts to curve or draw images of God at the place of worship. Because of these interdictions, the mosques are not permitted to have images of any person or nature under any circumstances. Even partnership with Allah is sin (*Shirk*) and if some one does this would be considered or termed as *Mushrik* (Polytheist). God is all powerful and all knowing and that illustrate the total submission of human beings to the divine will. The Koran strongly asserts human responsibility and obligation warning men about the dire consequences of violating God's will. As at the beginning of every *Surah*, Allah is referred to "the most merciful, the compassionate" stressing on God as judge and punisher.

### **Revelation**

Islam stresses that God communicates humanity through selected persons whom He revels. God has done it even in the past through a number of individuals - Prophets like Noah, Salih, Had, Abraham, Moses, David Solomon and Jesus. Through them God has given humanity, a revelation which has been compiled into a book of some sort, yet not all the books are survived but the Koran as the scripture has been the scripture of Allah. The followers of the scripture are known as the "People of the Book". And they are often referred as Christian and Jews. The Koran pronounces two words to refer the prophetic figures, the first is '*Rusal*' messenger or apostle of God or Allah. This term was used in *Shahada* for Mohammad, who is *Rusal* of God, the second is *Nabi*, means 'Prophet' which is used only for the

Prophet Mohammad in the Koran. The use of *Nabi* also appears to be absent from the earlier prophetic revelations. The phrase used in the scripture is ('*Khatam a nabiyyin'*,) means "seal of the Prophets", which has been understood by all the Muslims that Mohammad was the last prophet and the last messenger of Allah.

### **Spiritual Realm: Life after Life**

The Koran describes paradise or heaven and hell in which paradise is place where men are rewarded by all kind of foods and women of their own choice. However, it is distinctly seemed to be symbolic. Hell fire is described as the punishment to the unbelievers. The Koran also mentions '*Jinn*' and angels, who too are created by God. Hence, Muslims believe their existence, though they cannot be seen, as they are mere spirits. Such kinds of spirits are variously referred in Koran by their names like Jibrail (Gabriel), who brought revelation to the Prophet Mohammad and Azrail, Israfil and Michael as well. Saitan - an evil spirit is also mentioned in Koran at the same time by the name of *Iblis*. According to the Islamic tradition, this was the spirit who declined to obey the God's command of bowing before Adam, as he would not bow to any other being than Allah. Because of his disobedient act, *Iblis* (Saitan) was thrown out from the heaven.

### **Humanity**

The Koran speaks: "God created humanity from backed clay" but there is no mention that individual was being created by two different parts, a body and soul as this is associated with Christian belief. Nevertheless, at a later stage, this belief was accepted in Islam. The Islamic theology stresses that human beings were created for good cause. Islam does not say regarding the fall and original sin. Nevertheless, human beings are challenged continuously in their lives for constructing moral alternatives. Hence, human beings have free desire and so more free moral agents. In brief, it can be said that humanity in Islam is an essence of creation which supersedes even the spheres of knowledge and values.

#### **Box 18.2 Mission of Human kind**

Allah asked to the heaven and earth: "Would they take-up the task of creating a moral order of creation, on the account of heavy burden, it had been refused by them; Koran speaks humanity accepted the challenges rather a mission of humankind for the sake of establishing moral and spiritual orders on the earth." In this respect, *Iblis* (Saitan) is not only sole actor who tries to disrupt these moral and spiritual orders of the world but laziness in humanity and distortion of actual form of nature also act simultaneously where unbelief makes it very complex. Hence, Mohammad was called on by Allah to shoulder the responsibility to accept, to surrender, and to obey God's will borne by humanity. In Islam, creation has no option, but to become a true Muslim one has to surrender to the God's will. However, human being has open option in the form of humanity.

### **Final Judgment 'Kayamat'**

The Koran often mentions about the day of judgement when all human beings will be accounted of their humanity through their deeds. If belief was formed true, they will be rewarded by Paradise (*Zannat*) and in case of unfaithful they will be punished by hell's fire. On the day of judgement - *Kayamat*, all dead bodies will rise up from their respective graves / tombs and with this, ultimately, the whole universe will be eliminated.

## **18.7 Islam in India**

The impact of Islam on India is more than a millennium old. It influence initiated when Arab conquest the Sind in the beginning of eighth century.

Hence, Islam is an important religion in India historically and very meaningful cultural tradition too. The Islam in India has been co-existing with Hinduism, representing their own traditional world-view. Value themes of Islam in general were holistic, ideologically the principle of inequality in the form of caste was not accepted and its values of transcendence were rooted in the principle of monotheism.

Islam does not provide any margin for social inequalities. The principal concept working in Islamic faith stresses that all human beings are equal before the Allah (Almighty). The concept prevails as *xalaqulla* (the people of Almighty). But the case of Indian Muslims suggest that the Hindu social structure is persisting along with the Islamic values in the form of inequality. Ashrafs always maintain their social distance from the converts in the establishment of marriage and kinship ties and never recognize them as equal to them. The caste inequality continues within the converts. They perform their traditional caste rituals and continue to remain engaged in their generations old traditional occupations (Singh, 1973, 193-194).

However, the apparent heterogeneity found in Islamic community from Arab to Indus makes out a case of social inequality. The Indian case appears to be peculiar one, as Indian Muslims seem to have accepted the caste - like structure within their social set up. Various movements for the recognition of 'backward' class within the Muslim are the sheer reflections of such an acceptance (Abbasi, 1999). A number of sociological and anthropological studies indicate the presence of caste - like structure among the Indian Muslims (Ansari, 1960; Dumont, 1970; Mandelbaum, 1972; Ahmed, 1978; Abbasi 1988; Chauhan, 1992). Dumont (1970) has treated it as a cultural entity and argued that the presence of caste - like structure among Indian Muslims is the result of cultural assimilation. On the other hand, several other scholars treat caste as a structural entity and argue that the elements of Hindu social structure have been transferred among Muslims as a consequence of conversion en masse during the Muslim rule in India.

The Indian case of Islam, hence, presents a typical illustration against the universal theme values of egalitarianism and brotherhood. The inequalities are attributed and in way institutionalized by birth, to the highest and lowest strata of society. These structural features survive even after embracing Islam.

## 18.8 Conclusion

Islam came into existence in the early stage of seventh century as historical phenomena, through revelation, which are supposed to have come to Prophet Mohammad via the Angel Gabriel. These revelations are given in 114 Suras or chapters. However, Muslim doctors interpret that revelation must have come to Mohammad by direct inspiration of the Angel Gabriel or in visions in which the Angel Gabriel appeared to him. Before the revelation, the social setting of Arabia was such that killing of female girls was very common. Polytheism was practiced rampantly and clan based social organization was relevant. Idols worship was very common. In order to abolish these social evils, Mohammad was chosen by God as His messenger. Mohammad began to take the revealed message to the people of Mecca. His message emphasized to accept the one and only transcendental God; the Mohammad is His last and beloved messenger; that idol worship and killing female babies were forbidden and one must be always ready for the final day of judgement (*Kayamat*). Islam is a structured religion, having its major summary of teaching consisting in five pillars, which in turn determine the universal way of social life as well as life after death. In addition to the five pillars, Islam does have its metaphysics - an understanding about the nature of existing things. The

major concerns of Islamic metaphysics are : Allah, the Prophet, the Revelation, and the religion; the spiritual dominance further extends as heaven and hell, saitans, angels, and *Jinns*; then nature of human beings, their norms for existence, nature of physical realm and the last day of judgement they will have to face. All these ideological themes altogether constitute an Islamic society, cutting across the national and racial boundaries.

However, if sociological treatment is given to Islam, one would arrive that Islam originated in a nomadic socio-cultural setting in Arabia at the initial stage, having tribal egalitarian features in its social structure. Since the structure of such nomadic groups was not highly ordered and their shifting from clan and kin based egalitarianism to religion, oriented egalitarianism was relatively convenient (Singh, 1973:65). However, Islam was even spread in the complex societies. Within a century, after the death of Prophet Mohammad, the power of Islam was established far from the Arab peninsula covering the Atlantic coasts of Spain and North Africa as well as across the Indus River.

## 18.9 Further Reading

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# Unit 19

## Hinduism

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- 19.4 Hinduism and the Concept of Religion
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- 19.7 Conclusion
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### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- provide a working definition of Hinduism;
- describe Hinduism and the Concept of religion;
- outline purusharth - the four ends of life; and
- explain the dharm-achar complex of Hinduism.

### 19.1 Introduction

What is called Hinduism today is not like a bolt from the blue. It has grown out of a long historical (including pre-historical) process. Rather, it has grown out of the dynamics of an ongoing configurational evolution. The drama of this evolution originated and unfolded itself on the soil of Bharat that is Hindustan and India - that India which throughout her history refrained from coinciding its political frontiers with its religious and/or cultural frontiers. In its ontology, both in Time (*Kal*) and Space (*Desh*), Hinduism has been having a remarkable resilience and continuity, though it has grown out of the acculturative give and take of diverse ethnic groups and races, and their language cultures and thought-processes. Or, to use D.N. Majumdar's phrase, it has grown out of the dynamics of 'clash of cultures and contacts of races,' and even religions leading to a striking synthesis in which Sanskrit language played a crucial role (Majumdar, D.N. 1965, Chatterji, S.K. 1965).

Nevertheless, the ontology of Hinduism has been being inspired by the *Upanishadic* exhortation of charaiveti (march on, march on) and the Gita's mystical but matter of fact worldview of avibhaktam *vibhakteshu* - unity in diversity. These principles emanate from and pervade *jagatyam jagat* (ever changing world); and, hence, they also pervade the metaphysical and the mundane, the world herein and the world hereafter - in short, they pervade man and his existential bases and dimensions.

Realization of *avibhaktam vibhakteshu* is the intrinsic trait of the highest and purest knowledge (*uttam* and *sattvik jnan*). For his ultimate welfare and happiness, man has to endeavour to cultivate it (Gita, chap. 18). So, in its ideological worldview about man and his existence, about Nature and Nurture in relation to man, Hinduism has tended to combine unity

with diversity, catholicism with eclecticism, orthodoxy with heterodoxy, world-negation with life's fulfillment, *yog* with *bhog* and *loksangrah* with *aparigrah*.

Hinduism

### A Way Of Life

In certain judicial pronouncements, Hinduism is characterized as 'a way of life'. There emerges a logical query - whose way of life? Is it of the so called Hindus or of the people of India who, according to a very early definition, fall within the definitional penumbra of the Hindu and Hinduism.

On the other hand, with regard to its contents, Hinduism is seen contained in its caste-structure and its mechanistic operation in ritual mobility. Caste structure, the real and the empirical, is wrongly equated with *varna*-order (the ideal). Hinduism, consequently, becomes a religion of a society, bound by its time and space. It is supposed to attain nationalistic overtones. Its existence beyond the Hindu, the caste and Bharat (that is India) is viewed to be a nebulous possibility (Bonquiet, A.C. 1964).

## 19.2 Methodological Perspective

Having reference to the issues raised here, and also in the framework of these issues, the present essay presents an introductory description and analysis of Hinduism. This analytical description is presented from a sociological perspective. This perspective does not accept the dualism of Anthropology and Sociology. In India and also in South-East Asia, because of the social-structural phenomena prevailing here, Social Anthropology has created an 'intellectual space' in Sociology (Madan, T.N. 1985).

This presentation therefore cuts across Sociology and Anthropology. It is not biotic though it has elements of ethnography in its description. It is mostly historical-comparative. It is not through and through structural and/or functional. It, however, does not sidetrack structure though it lays a greater emphasis on 'meaning' in relation to ideology. For, even structure attains meaning in the light of ideology. Whether one believes in and worships *nirakar* (impersonal) or *sakar* (personal) or one believes in monotheistic or polytheistic theology or in both, or in atheism, it does not depend on structure but on ideology though structure does reflect in the Man-God-Relationship anywhere and everywhere.

Sociology overemphasizes empiricism and theory. Anthropology also follows that path. In the perspective on which Hinduism rests, there is continuum between the empirical and the philosophical and even the mystical just as there is continuum between *Lok/Desh* and *Shashtra* in the ever moving backdrop of *jagat* and *kal*. Both in Sociology and Anthropology, we have tended to emphasize - rather over emphasize - the empirical (*Lok / Desh*). In the continuum of Hinduism *Lok* and *Shashtra* borrow from and straighten each other (Misra, Vidyaniwas ibid., 1995). So do the empirical and the philosophical.

## 19.3 Etiology and Definition of Hinduism

Hinduism is a compound and a hybrid term. It consists of Hindu + ism, with both the terms being of foreign origin. In English, 'ism' is a derogatory term when used in the context of 'any distinctive doctrine or practice'. If used as suffix to form a noun, it expresses especially a state or quality, or a system or principle or peculiarity in language.

Hinduism (as in barbarism and heroism) does not express a state or quality. It also does not express a peculiarity in language (as in Americanism). It sounds reasonable to suggest that those who might have

coined this term possibly used it in the sense of the system or the principles of life of the Hindus denoting their orientation to the traditional (in a way conservative) style of life and its ideological resource. However, derivatively, it may be surmised that Hinduism stands for the principles of the social system of Hindus as found in their traditions which combine a characteristic conservatism with dynamics, eclecticism and change and continuity.

It is in this sense that Hinduism stands not for 'a way of life' but for the way of life of Hindus. And, who is Hindu? In the context of this question, the meaning of the term Hindu as socio-linguistic usage and its dynamics attains a crucial place in an endeavour to define Hinduism. In the long span of India's social history, as socio-linguistic usage, the term Hindu has undergone changes but has had a thematic continuity. Linguistically, the term Hindu is said to be a corrupt form of Sindhu. It came into being when, linguistically, the 'S' of Sindhu (the river) changed into 'H' and Sindhu incarnated itself as Hindu and, later on, in English, as the Hindu or Hindus.

#### Box 19.1 The Term Hindu

As a linguistic usage, the term Hindu originated in the land sprawling to the West of the river Sindhu. It is said to have had Persian ancestry just as the term India is said to have had Greek ancestry. The river Sindhu, Indus in Greek, entered into the early definition of the Hindu and India.

Evidently, thus, the term Hindu originated with the geographical connotation, referring to those who inhabited the land lying to the East of Sindhu. With the advent of the followers of Islam in India (the Arab, the Turk, the Mughal and the Persian) this connotation received contrasting religious overtones in the dichotomy of the Hindu and the Musalman. This approach, in spite of its rejection, tended to continue.

With the consolidation of British colonialism and the advent of aggressive evangelical Christianity, many developments took place simultaneously. Both the Hindu and the Muslim recoiled in the grooves of their heritage and grew parallelly. Evidence of it may be traced in the writings of Raja Mohan Roy and Sir Sayad Ahmad Khan and, later on, in the writings of Ravindra Nath Tagore and Allama Iqbal (Dinkar, Ram Dhari Singh *ibid.*).

During the medieval period, spanning over about one thousand years, there originated four processes having the undertones of religious experience but basically operating in the broad expanse of acculturation between the Hindu and the Musalman or to use the current phrase, between Hinduism and Islam. One process is evident in the Arabicization of Islam in India, linking Indian Muslims to Arabic traditions of Islam. This is not something peculiar to Islam. It is found as a process of acculturation almost in all organized and proselytizing supra-national religions owing existence in the religious experience of a historical person who is given the hallow of being a messenger of the *Alaukik*.

Simultaneously, in the medieval period flowed the powerful stream of *Bhakti Marg*, encompassing both the Hindu and the Muslim. Like the Ganga-Yamuna-Sangam at Allahabad, it is a confluence of two currents - *Sagun Bhakti* and *Nirgun Bhakti*. *Sagun Bhakti* is traditional, revivalistic and nativistic. It is evident in the Ramcharit Manas of Tulsi Das and Anandvan Bhuwan of Ram Das, Shivaji's Guru (Sarkar, Binoy Kumar *ibid.* 1937).

Both these outstanding personalities of medieval India take recourse to *Avtaravad*, with Tulsi Das presenting Ram as an *Avtar*. Ram takes *Avtar* to kill *Nishachar* (*Rakshas*, demon) and *Khal* (the deviants from the righteous path). As he accepts, he seeks to establish what has been propounded as righteous path by different Puranas and the traditions of *Agam* and *Nigam*.

It is often not taken into consideration that nearly all the propounders of *Bhakti* and the religious experience of *Advait*, *Dvait*, *Dvaitadvait* and *Vishistadvait* drew their mystically-philosophically oriented theological view of religious experience from *Prasthanatryi - Upnishad*, Gita and *Brahmasutra*. These classical works acquired cardinal strategy since Hinduism faced the problem of its theological distinction. And, this necessitates a relook at the prevalent view of a majority of historians that the *Bhakti* movement was inspired by Islam. Rather, it grew from within the cultural resource of Hinduism having strong touch of nativism and protest which is social as well as political. *Bhakti*, whether *nirgun* or *sagun*, is wrought and overflows with the ideology of *avibhaktam vibhakteshu*.

### Sankritization and Hinduism

In this context, let us refer back to the question already posed. This is about the kinship between Sanskritization and Hinduization. It need be noted that in the different conceptual shades of Sanskritization, the term 'Sanskrit', 'Sanskritik (Sanskritic)' and 'Sanskritic Storehouse' occupy crucial place. All these terms definitely refer to Sanskrit language and to literature in Sanskrit which normatively relates to various aspects of man's existence. The *Sanskritik* attains meaning only in the dichotomy of 'Sanskritik' and 'non-Sanskritik'.

#### Box 19.2 Aspects of the Sanskritik

To differentiate the '*Sanskritik*' from '*non-Sanskritik*' is treacherous. Is goat-sacrifice, as prevalent in the Mahasu temples among the polyandrous people of Western Himalaya, Sanskritik or non-Sanskritik? Inspite of being associated with the ritual of goat sacrifice, Mahasu is believed to be Maheshvar and a form of Narain. He is also Raghunath which is an epithet for Ram.

Mahasu, on the other hand, is derivable from word 'Su' meaning Devta in Kinnauri, with the latter falling in the Austric family of languages. The Kol and the Mundari belong to the Austric family and are linked to proto-Australoids (Chatterji, S.K. ibid., 1965). Mahasu, thus, may be derived as 'Maha' (Sanskrit) + 'Su' (Austric). In this mixture of language cultures, the Sanskritik and non-Sanskritik mix as milk and water and not as water and oil. Similar is the case with the intermixture of flower-ritual which is Dravidian and the ritual of Havan which is Aryan. When the term Sanskrit is pivotal in the concept of Sanskritik why the other dimension of its meaning be neglected. As an adjective, the term 'Sanskrit' means what is perfect, refined, polished, cultivated, consecrated, hallowed, purified and excellent. It also connotes what has been purified and consecrated through purificatory rites (Apte, V.S. 1963). This meaning is the crux of the Sanskrit in Sanskritization. It refers to the nexus of rituals and also to the whole nexus of *varnashram* ideology of which *varn-caste* based rituals are a part.

In the Hindu Social thought, the dichotomy of the *Shastra* and the *Lok* has been used since ages to understand the linkage between what is today being conceived as the Sanskritik and non-Sanskritik. India developed the categories of the *Lok* and the *Shastra* to maintain and to explain unity in

diversity. This dichotomy seems to be more relevant than that of the Sanskritik and non-Sanskritik. As Vidyaniwas Misra (1995) points out, there is no either or relationship between the two. They enter into and borrow from each other to lend empirical meaning to and straighten each other.

With these brief notes, let us again refer to the propounders-expounders of Sanskritization and their exposition as far as goes the genetics of Sanskritization in its kin-relationship with Hinduism and Hinduisations. With Sarkar, Sanskritization is not a well-assessed and meticulously constructed methodological concept. It is at best a perspective on the onward march of Hindu positivism, contained in the dynamic continuity of *Smritiniti* tradition. In his work on The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology, he uses this term Sanskritization in the context of the Sanskritization of Tamil culture, of Marathi language and Sanskritizing or Hinduizing of Persian texts. Apparently, Sarkar's usage of Sanskritization is essentially linguistic but, as a perspective, it gets loaded with wider implications when his usage of 'Sanskritizings or Hinduizings' is taken into consideration (Sarkar, Binoy Kumar 1937 ibid., 372, 507-8, 511, 538).

### M. N. Srinivas's Viewpoint

Srinivas seeks to present Sanskritization as an empirically valid and value-neutral concept though the phenomenon it seeks to delimit and comprehend is not value-neutral. To quote Srinivas (1966, 6), "Sanskritization is the process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and, frequently twice born caste. Generally, such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste-hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community."

In this process of mobility, the behaviour of the dominant caste of the region, nor the *varnashram* ideology, is the guiding star of the process of Sanskritization. The dominant caste is the caste which carries a lion's share in the social-economic-political resources of the region. The dominant caste of the region may come from any of the three castes, viz., the Brahman, the Kshatriya and the Vaishya.

Since, a dominant caste - for that matter any caste of any of the three levels - falls under the penumbra of a *varn*, operationally, Srinivasa's Sanskritization gets interlinked with varn-model of the dominant caste. Srinivas delineates the three *varn*-models - the Brahman, the *Kshatriya* and the *Vaishya*. Which of these *varn*-models operates where depends on the dominant caste of the region. Srinivasa's *varn*-model is thus derived from the dominant caste. In his scheme, the empirical possibility of the dominance of *Shudra* model is absent though it is also a reality. Both these stands are untenable ideologically as well as methodologically.

#### Action and Reflection 19.1

Talk to some knowledgeable Hindu practitioners about the definition of Hinduism. Note down the main points of your discussion in your notebook.

To Srinivas (1952, 65) being 'an enormously complex and amorphous phenomenon, Hinduism defies to lend itself to a definition. It, however, has a long history and a wide and complex vertical and horizontal spread. In the process of its growth it has developed certain characteristics. Its structural basis lies in the caste. As evident in the caste-based rites, rituals and beliefs, it is both Sanskritik and non-Sanskritik. The more one moves downward on the horizontal ladders of castes, the non-Sanskritik

becomes more conspicuous and profound at the levels of beliefs and practices, rites and rituals and even man-*devta* relationship.

Hinduism

Srinivas delineates three levels in the spatial-structural setting of Hinduism. The intellectual-philosophical level is represented by the Upanishad, the Gita and philosophical systems and commentaries on them. The level of the ordinary and the common consists of feasts, fasts, *vratas* (rites and austerity performed to achieve certain ends), pilgrimages, visits to nearby temple and sayings and songs of local saints.

Operationally, the third level of Hinduism relates to the process of its horizontal and vertical spread. In the horizontal spread of Hinduism Srinivas delineates four strata - All India Hinduism (which is chiefly Sanskritik), Peninsular Hinduism, Regional Hinduism (not clearly defined) and Local Hinduism. As Srinivasa's work indicates local Hinduism is village based.

Srinivas is aware of the diversity of the local but he does not emphasize and elaborate it. He seems to be more concerned with homogeneity that spreads through his constricted concept of Sanskritization than diversity and its amorphous networking through individual and society.

He emphasises on the absorption of diversity into Hinduism bespeaks of it. In the vertical and horizontal spread of Hinduism, Sanskritization plays a crucial role. He attributes All India spread of Hinduism to the extension of Sanskritik deities and ritual forms to outlying groups, greater Sanskritization of inside groups, easy absorption of local deities and the role of kings (political power) in the vertical and horizontal spread of Hinduism.

Generally, so far, sociologists have tended to neglect the role of power and acculturation in the origin, organization and spread of religion. This is so inspite of the fact that in the Indian ideology, in the relationship between man and *devta*, *devta* is *Raja* and *Raja* is *devta*. Ghurey's analysis of the role of elites in the conceptualization of God and/or gods could not catch the attention of the sociologists of incoming generations.

In our approach to understand the relationship between religion and society, we have been so much enamoured by the Western approach that we did not care - and, even today do not care - as to how in the past we have sought to explain our own structural setting based on *varn-caste* and the ideology of *avibhaktam vibhakteshu*. In this context we need to have a clearer understanding of what is Sanskritik.

## 19.4 Hinduism and the Concept of Religion

If Hinduism defies a definition, it also challenges the cardinal postulates of the concept of religion as it is prevalent in Sociology and Anthropology. To say that Hinduism is not religion does not however imply that Hinduism, as a way of life, is totally devoid of what sociologist conceives as 'religious experience'.

Sociologically, religious experience is intrinsic to social phenomenon called Religion. But religion, however, is not definable solely on the basis of this experience. Though subjective, experience in general tends to be related to something external, material and non-material. It may be internal as well. Religious experience relates to something which is unempirical and non-material, believed to be beyond this phenomenal world. That something is the Supernatural of the sociologist and the anthropologist. It is non-Human, super-human and all-pervasive transcendental Power. Like procreation and other institutionalized forms of behaviour related to man's needs, it is an intrinsic part of man's existential baggage. By his very

nature, in his existence, man combines the world herein and the world hereafter. The Superhuman belongs to the world hereafter.

Religion takes birth when this experience enters into and expresses itself in man's institutionalized behaviour, in his beliefs and practices related to the Supernatural - and, all this complex of phenomenon affects and shapes man's interpersonal, intra-group and inter-group relationships with a strong sense of identity as related to the concept and explanation to the conceived Supernatural.

### **Monotheism and Religion**

Here, the monotheistic and monolithic concept of religion, intellectually set in the civilizational framework of Semetism, stood face to face with the polytheism of the multiplicity of gods coupled with the worship of ghosts, spirits, material objects, phenomena of Nature, with each phenomenon being governed by a god or gods and ancestor worship. Here gods and spirits were personal and anthropomorphized, as good as fellow human beings who, by possessing selected males and/or females, would talk face to face with the person in distress and difficulty or needing emotional security and serenity.

In the monotheistic concept of religion, the Supernatural Power, by concept, was the male. Beyond this, the Supernatural Power also manifested itself in the masculine and feminine genders and with innumerable varied forms. This interface of the savage and the civilized, the sophisticated and the bizarre turned the European thought to evolutionism as a methodology. It is evident in the evolution, diffusion, modernization and development - all these thrown up in quick succession one after the other.

It led to the search for the origins of religion and that led to many alternatives. These alternatives are the concept of soul, the ancestor/ghost worship (which seems to have been transferred from the Divinity of Ghost of the dominant religion of Europe), Animism, childlike psychology of the primitive and the early man and to fear and the need for emotional security coupled with the need for spiritual serenity.

Consequently, on the methodological-intellectual planes of Sociology and Anthropology, there surfaced, in bold relief, the dichotomy of animistic (polytheistic) and monotheistic religions, with the former being looked at as something bizarre and beyond the civilizational framework. Inspite of apologetic methodology of functionalism - which overflows with sympathy and lacks empathy - it has tended to continue, somewhere surfacingly and somewhere clandestinely and in disguise.

#### **Box 19.3 Aspects of Sampradaya**

As the doctrine of *marg*, *panth* and *Samaj* gets rigid and averse to modification and change, it becomes a *sampradaya* with a touch of fundamentalism. It then invokes protest either doctrinally or through the form of the Supernatural the Sampradaya is associated with. The protest may be against the socio-political order of the day and, that, too, more through the doctrine and pronouncements of the Supernatural (Hardiman, David 1987). The dynamics of schismatic divisions and differentiations within the Bramha Samaj and Radha Swami *panths* bear witness to it (Bhatt, G.S., 1968, 1994).

It is opined that, as a methodology, the Church-sect typology, with certain adjustments, can be applied to modern religions which develop organizational structure. *Panths* and *Samajas* which grew in modern and medieval India can hardly be described as sects since Hinduism is

not Ecclesia. Hinduism has been having its own social organizational dynamics which solicits sociological enquiry.

Before closing this section let us again return to the concept of religious experience. Why this experience of the Supernatural? Is it for founding religion? It is well known that religions have been founded not by those who had the religious experience. Religions have been founded by those who followed the original preceptor and on the basis of his sayings and/or writings. Initial experience is not for founding a religion. It is ecstatic. It is *anand - sachidanand*.

It is the state of spiritual bliss where as Kabir feels one becomes *kanchan* (gold). As says Tulsidas, "*Soi Janahi jehi dehu Janaiyi / Janati tumahi tumahi hoi jayi* - only that one can realize you whom you make yourself known. After knowing you one becomes You". And, what is that ? That is One and That exists and in that existence, ultimately, neither that exists nor the One. It is the stage of nothingness to which *puja* takes the devotee. For, in the Flame of Light of That, the devotee and That mingle for a bliss of nothingness, *shunyata*. Is such an experience religious? How and in what way. It is at best a way among many ways. A true experience originates in the *Lok* but, ultimately, it becomes *Alaukik*. Religion cannot lift one to that level of experience leading to realization. It is essentially individual.

## 19.5 Purusharth: The four ends of Hinduism

In view of what has been presented so far, Hinduism is an ideology. This ideology is based on empirical realities of man's existence. Since, in these realities, the aims, needs and ultimate welfare of man occupies strategic place, this ideology besides being ideal, tends to be philosophical. It may be termed as ideological-philosophical. It encompasses both the empirical and the philosophical aspects of man's existence.

*Dharm*, therefore, becomes the highest and the most prestigious and highly sought for end of man's life. It, however, is not the only one, there being the other three, known as *Arth*, *Kam* and *Moksh*. Considering individual's organic and social evolution in society (enculturation and socialization), they are placed in a sequential order. In that sequence *Dharm* is placed first. Then, in order it is followed by *Arth*, *Kam* and *Moksh*. Despite this sequential order of hierarchy, in the totality of the order of *Dharm*, each one of these is equally important as, without each one of them, man's life in society would be incomplete and not conducive to the required happy fulfillment of life.

### Action and Reflection 19.2

Read the section on Purusharth and then discuss it with a Hindu Priest. Is his view similar to yours or not? Write down your findings in your notebook.

As a conceptual term, in the Indian thought and literature, *Dharm* has had a long history. It has been used in various contexts and has varied linguistic usages. It is said that in the sense of Cosmic Order, it, in due course, replaced the Vedic concept of *Rit*. The latter stands for the laws determining the order of the Cosmos. There, it is a mystical force binding the universe to a natural order and man's social existence to a moral order.

In the Vedic usage, *Dharm* stands for custom, moral laws, general law, duty and what is right. In general, *Dharm* carries two connotations. In one, it stands for the laws of the natural order of a phenomenon. In

another, it stands for obligations which man owes to himself, towards others including man, animal and universe. An anecdote cited in *dharma* discourses may illustrate it.

*Artha* is commonly used in the sense of *dhan* (wealth). It is also used in the sense of money. But, as *Dharma*, *Artha* becomes far more inclusive. It includes attainment of riches, property, worldly prosperity, advantage and profit. Broadly, it is used in the sense of riches. In a specific sense, *Artha* may be taken to stand for such 'tangible objects' as 'can be possessed, enjoyed and lost'. Man needs them to found and raise a family and for the fulfillment of life.

In Hinduism, poverty is not virtue. Poverty and hunger can drive a man to commit any sin. Man's virtues shine only in and with wealth. Without wealth even a good lineage does not bring status. Wealth is needed to follow *Dharma*. *Dharma* alone cannot be the source of happiness. Kautilya emphasizes importance of wealth in man's life and opposes widespread renunciation as it interferes with production.

Ordinarily, *Kama* is taken to be sex-drive and its satisfaction. As that, it is viewed as the lowest of *Purusarthas* though in the ideational ranking of the ends in man's life, it is placed at the third place. It comes before *Moksha* which is the highest end of life. It indicates that without the fulfillment of *Dharma*-regulated *Artha* and *Kama* attainment of the highest end remains an unachievable possibility.

As mere sex-drive and its satisfaction, *Kama* is lust, sensuous enjoyment. It is an obstruction to man's spiritual progress. As such, it is an enemy of man, others being anger, greed, temptation, conceit and jealousy. But, on the other hand, *Kama* is the basis of socially regulated mating (marriage). On it depends the propagation of species. Marriage is the door to *Graha**sthashram* (the householder stage) which is viewed as the most crucial in man's social existence. This is the highly praised stage.

From the psychological perspective, Prabhu defines *Kama* a bit more inclusively. He includes all the desires in man for the enjoyment and satisfaction of the life of senses. *Kama*, therefore, refers to the native impulses, instincts and desires of man and his natural mental tendencies. It finds its equivalent in the use of such English terms as desires, needs, basic motives, urges or drives. In totality, *Kama* refers to the innate desires and drives of man (Prabhu, P.H. 1963, 80).

Gokhle B.G.. (1961, 82) opines that *Artha* is good source of fulfilling the desire and needs of *Kama*. For, good food and drink, pleasant and charming company, find clothes, perfumes, ornaments and garlands are pre-eminent sources of *Kama*. However, looking at the importance of a woman as a wife in *Graha**sthashram*, and, in a wider perspective, at the place of male-female in the expression of *Kama* and at the view in which *Kama* is the enemy of man, it is ordained that the good of man depends on a harmonious blending of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*. Mental and bodily happiness is the immediate object of *Kama*. Indulgence but with detachment is advocated as the medium path in the attainment of *Artha* and *Kama*. It is termed as *nivrittyatmak pravritti*.

*Moksha* is the highest and most sought after *Purusharth*. Like *Dharma*, it is highly critical and most discussed. Literally, it means freedom. As commonly understood, it stands for freedom from *Samsara*, this world. It is based on the theory that this world is illusion. It is substanceless. The real is the *Parmatma*. Man's soul being a part (*ansh*) of *Parmatma* yearns to mingle and merge in *Parmatma* eternally.

In this view, the theory of rebirth and *karm* finds a strategic place. The soul is born again and again till it attains *Moksh*. It may be reborn in any of the eighty four lakh *yonis* (species) as per the *karm* of this and the previous birth. Its evolution in the hierarchy of *yonis* depends on the *karm* in this life coupled with those of the previous life. Birth in *Manushya Yoni* (human form) is the highest evolution of soul and an opportunity to attain *Moksh*. The choice lies with man. His success or failure depends on his *Karm*.

**Ashram-Sanskar :** Along with the four ends of life, goes the ideology of *Ashram* and *Sanskars*. Like the four *Purusharthas*, there are four *Ashramas*, the stages of man's life in society. They are rather four spans. Presuming man's life's span to be of one hundred years, man's life is divided into four spans, with each span consisting of twenty five years. It begins with the stage of *Brahmacharya*, leading to *Grahareshram* and then to *Vanaprasth* and finally to *Sanyas* leading to final extinction.

The four *Purusharthas* are associated with these four stages. The first stage, the studentship (*Brahmacharya*), is for acquiring of knowledge of *Dharm*. The second, the *Grahareshram*, goes with the pursuit of *Arth* and *Kam*. With *Vanaprasth* begins the gradual retirement leaving the reins of family in the hands of new generation. With *Sanyas* begins the complete renunciation. It is the stage of renunciation from family, village, caste and even from the life partner.

If the idea of complete renunciation has been held in Hinduism, it is in Hinduism that it has been challenged as well. Doubts have been raised if complete renunciation is a possibility in view of Gita's dictum that *Dehivan* (one with an organic form) cannot be *akarma* (that is devoid of *Karm*). Requirements of body, particularly of food, sleep and shelter, would not admit that. No *Sanyasi* could ever live away from *Math*, panthic Gurudwaras and Ashramas. They often moved and lived on the periphery of village - now they mostly live in the city.

*Sanskars*, described as rites de passage, are ordinarily said to be sixteen in number. Their linkage with the stages of life has been very well described by Prabhu and others (Prabhu, P.H. ibid 1963). All these *ashrams* are the part of man's life and its evolution. As proliferation of *ashrams* tends to indicate *Vanaprasth* and *Sanyas* have not become eclipsed. Rather, they have acquired new dimensions.

Here certain aspects of *Purusharthas* and *Ashramas* need be noted. In view of their inevitable linkage with life which can not exist without and away from society, *Sanyas*, as associated with the *Purusharth* of *Moksh*, assumes social significance in the scheme of life. Ordinarily, whole life is viewed as preparation for *Moksh*. The Ashram of *Sanyas* is viewed to be a specialized stage for the preparation of *Moksh*.

This is the stage in which through the institution of *Sanyas* man can become *Mumuksh*, i.e. one oriented to *Moksh*. Viewed differently, in this stage of life, man, infact, attains freedom. Nirmal Kumar Bose viewed *Sanyas* as the safety valve of caste society. On entering *Sanyas*, one rises above caste, its occupational and economic bondages, its distinctions, differentiations, disabilities and hierarchy. He becomes a free man provided he wills for it.

**Raj Dharm :** Since, in Hinduism, *Dharm* encompasses the whole of man's life in society, there also developed the concept of *Raj Dharm* i.e. the *Dharm* of *Raj*. The word *Raj* does not denote *Raja* but governance. This *Dharm* binds the ruler and the ruled in a righteous order for which *Raj Dharm* lays down the rules. In *Raj Dharm*, besides the rules of governance,

there developed the concept of *Raja Devta* with tutelary character and role. It was present during the medieval period and it was present during the British period as evident in the title of 'Company Bahadur' for East India Company and the song composed by Rabindra Nath Tagore which has been incorporated in India's National Anthem.

In this song, addressed to the British king, George V, the king is addressed as '*Jan gan man adhinayak*' - the ruler of the hearts of common man and he is hailed as that. This finds expression in '*Jaya*' of political leaders. Historians have amply brought out the ingredients of the *Raj Dharm* under the subject of the ruler, state and society (see Gokhle, B.G. 1961; Ghoshal, U.N. 1959; Majumdar, R.C. and Pusalkar (ed.) 1953, 54).

***Uttam Purush*** : The concept of *Uttam Purush*, the highest of man, as an ideology has been present in Hinduism since its inception. It has been translated as Ideal Man. But Prof. Radha Kamal Mukherjee conceptualizes it as Ideal Person. To call it the Man Perfected (Gokhle, B.G. 1961) is against the ethos of Hinduism. For, perfect is *Ishvar* and not man howsoever divinity he may acquire or inherit. Emphasizing the spirit of the age, the *Uttam Purush* is the guiding star of his age. The *jnani* of the *Upanishad*, the yogi of *Yog Marg* and the *Sthitprajna Karm Yogi* of the *Gita*, the Buddh of the *Baudhmat* and the *Kewalin* of the *Jain Mat* are some of the examples of ancient India.

The *Bhakt* is the *Uttam Purush* of medieval period. In the modern period, from the Arya Samaj arose the ideal personality of the Arya. The Arya stands for the sanskritik tradition and invites Indians to merge differences in Aryaism and become Arya. Gandhi's impact threw up the concept of *Satyagrahi* which with Vinoba Bhave grows into the concept of Sarvodayi who seeks development of all in the village-based traditional social structure which is an antidote to Westernization, commercialization and industrialism. *Sarvodayi* stands for *Aparigrahi* renunciation (Gokhle, B.G. 1961; Bhave, Vinoba, 1964).

## 19.6 Dham-Achar-Complex in Hinduism

In Hinduism man's existence in society from birth to death is *lokyatra* (journey through this world). This is unavoidable. Without it neither fulfillment of life, nor *Lok Sangrah* (welfare of the people) is possible. Fulfillment of requirements and obligations of *Dharm* are not possible without *Karm*-based vigorous *lokyatra*.

Man's *Gun-Shram* flower through *Karm* and *Lokyatra*. Linkage of *Karm* to *Dharm* results in the linkage of the both with *achar* (righteous conduct). To follow *achar* is the primary basis of *dharma*. That, however, does not imply that *Dharm* is unidimensional. Linkage of *dharma-achar* (Dharmachar) links individual to *Shastra* and *Lok / Desh*. This linkage is present in *Kul*, *Varn*, *Jati*, village and *desh* - which, sociologically, form the structural basis of man's social existence.

There is the dichotomy of *Acharvan* (the followers of righteous conduct) and *Acharbhrasht* (apostate, the fallen one). The latter is deviant and personally disorganized; he has lost the meaning and relevance of life. As in any other system, Hinduism, too, does not approve of deviation. It rather, ideologically, allows for protest against tyrannical and injurious deviance threatening the very righteous existence of man. The *kathas* in epics support this view.

*Achar* is conduct, behaviour, manner of action or of conducting oneself. *Achar* is custom, usage and practice. It is also used in the sense of customary law. In essence, it is usual, customary and established practice

(Apte, V.S. 1963). *Achar*, thus, is usual but righteous practice. In the sense of usual practice, *achar* is also *lokvyapar* (usual behaviour, practised by people). Being righteous and usual, it is *Karniya Karm* (*karm* worth doing) unless of course it goes against the standards of righteousness as defined by the *Shastra*, *Lok* and *Kal*.

As *Karniya Karm*, *achar* seeks to promote the welfare of individual in society and a synthesis of *swarth* and *parmath*. Linked to *Dharm*, *achar* pervades almost all the aspects and departments of life. Even a *sanyasi* is not above the *achar* of the *dharma* of *Sanyasi*. Since, man exists and operates at many levels and dimensions of his existence, *achar* tends to be specific to the level of the situation. Each ashram and *Pursharth*, for example, is linked to a set of *achsars*.

**Kulachar**, that is the *achar* of the *Kul* (lineage) encompasses marriage, family, *Kul* and extends upto kinship and caste. To cite an example, marriage with mother's brothers daughter in the plains of North India would be against the *achar* while, in the south and in the Fateh Parvat (in Uttarakhand), it is not a violation of *achar* relating to socially regulated mating. Again, marriage of a woman and her brother's daughter with the same person making them co-wives would not violate the local norms of marriage in Fateh Parvat (Bhatt, G.S., 1991).

After *Kul* and *gotra* come *varn-jati*. Though interlinked as the ideal and the real, they need be treated separately. However, in their explanations, sometimes, *gun* and *karm* are used. However, as linked to a *gun*, each *varn* has its innate disposition related to its prescribed *karm* in society. To follow prescribed *karm* becomes the *achar* of each *varn*. But, *achar* of a *varn* is most closely related to its rights, privileges and disabilities.

The linkage of *Varn*, ashram and *Purusharth* has crystallized in the *achar* of each *Purusharth* and its related ashram. In the form of do's and don'ts, an elaborate complex of *achsars* are provided for the student, the householder and the *sanyasi*. The householder, in particular has to follow the *achar* of *kul*, *gotra*, *varn-caste* and of *lok* along with those prescribed by the *Shastra*.

The caste till recently and largely even now in the rural living - circumscribes the life of an individual. Culturally, it is rather a bundle of *achsars*. They relate to endogamy and exogamy, rules of commensality, pollution and purity, consumption of food stuffs, socially inherited occupation and the way one is expected to conduct oneself in society. When in operation they carry a touch of the nuance of ritualism.

In the people's perception, at the level of *Lok*, they take the form of *Dharm-Karm* and are assiduously followed - once, in the scorching heat of the month of June, I travelled on bicycle from Lucknow to our village. On the way, I felt thirsty. On a wayside village, two villagers, cleanly dressed, were drawing water from a well by their *lota* (jug) and *dor* (thin rope). I requested them to help me with water. They said they were *chamar* by caste and felt hesitant. Being thirsty, I insisted. I reminded them that to quench the thirst of a person - and that, too, during summer - was a *punya karm*. The elder of them thought a while and then came forth, "we will not spoil our *dharma-karm*. You may do, if you like." They put their *lota-dor* on the pavement of the well and sat aside. They looked at me with wide eyes when I picked their *lota-dor*, drew water from the well and quench my thirst.

This happened about fifty years back. Such instances do occur in the country-side. But the *achsars* of caste-behaviour are being modified and changed as well. Village studies, studies on caste and intercaste relations

and also in novels written on the rural life, graphically depict operation and change of the *achar* related to caste and religious ethnocentrism.

*Achar* relating to *karm* is multifarious and multidimensional. From the point of view of *achar*, *karm* has been classified variously but mostly in such dichotomies as *Karniya-Akarniya Karm*, *Sit-Asit Karm* and *Shukla* and *Krishn Karm*. Gita's threefold classification, the triad, of *Sattvik*, *Rajas* and *Ttamas karm* is most popular and finds mention in the literature of *varn-karm*. Whereas the dichotomous classifications are ethical, the threefold classification is rooted in the methodological concept of *gun*, its types and their play. However, this methodological concept is intrinsically related to the philosophy of *gun* which cannot be avoided in understanding the role of *gun* in the social existence of man (Prabhu, P.H. 1963).

## 19.7 Conclusion

We have described and explained and analysed important aspects of religion with a relatively eclectic framework of method. We then moved on to describing the etiology and definition of Hinduism. Our next endeavour related to our exposition concerned Hinduism and the concept of religion itself. We then moved on to describing purusharth - the four ends of life. We finally examined the dhar-achar complex in Hinduism. The unit has then touched upon some of the core issues of Hinduism and dealt with them adequately.

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## Unit 20

# Secularism and Secularization

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### Contents

- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Definitions of Secularism
- 20.3 What is secularization?
- 20.4 Theories of Secularism
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### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- provide definitions of secularism;
- outline what is secularization;
- delineate theories of secularism; and
- describe the Indian and European experience of secularism and secularization.

### 20.1 Introduction

The word secular is derived from the Latin word *saeculum* which means century or age. *Saeculum* was the profane time and the time of ordinary historical succession, as opposed to sacred time. Time was interwoven with higher times variously called 'eternity', the time of the Ideas, or the time of the Origin, or the time of God. Human beings were living in all these times but only some acts, institutions, lives and social forms were more thoroughly directed towards temporal and non-spiritual goals. Government was more 'in the *saeculum*' in contrast with the Church (Taylor 1998: 31-2). The division of life in these two spheres was recognised as far back as Jesus Christ. In *circa* 30, legend has it, when he was asked whether taxes should be paid to Rome, Jesus replied, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' (Storey and utter eds 2002: 32).

The term secularism was coined in 1851 by George Jacob Holyoake, a socialist. In the background of 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism, the term secularism was a by-product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. While Renaissance asserted the dignity of the person, Enlightenment highlighted the autonomy of reason and science. Before proposing the term secularism, Holyoake had considered the terms 'netheism' (meaning neither theism nor an atheism) and 'limitationism' (probably hinting at limiting the religious influence). His first aim in proposing secularism was not to negate religion but to counter the irrationalism and supernaturalism of Christian theology. Holyoake's second aim in proposing secularism was to affirm the worth and dignity of a person and the autonomy of secular life (Jhingran 1995: 39-40).

## 20.2 Definitions of Secularism

Secularism and  
Secularization

Out of the commonly accepted three definitions of secularism one is people-centric, another is state-centric and yet another is India-specific. Firstly, the first people-centric definition emphasises the idea of separating religion from politics, economy, education, social life and culture. The purpose of this separation is not to stamp religion out from life but to contain it to the private lives of individuals. A secular state is not supposed to discourage the practice of religion but neither can it base its policies on religion. The ultimate goal is to make religion a personal affair. The initial steps in the containment of religious influence in society were taken at the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648 and during the French Revolution. In 1648 at the end of the Thirty Years' War in Europe, properties of the church were transferred to the exclusive control of the princes. Another significant moment in secularization came on 2 November 1789 when Talleyrand declared in the French National Assembly that all 'ecclesiastical goods', meaning religious institutions of which schools were prominent, were at the disposal of the nation (Mandan 1998: 298-9).

Most societies have followers of different faiths and this puts a great responsibility on the state to be neutral. The state-centric definition of secularism emphasises the need to keep the state neutral to all religions. Religious people would like to see the state to show equal regard to all faiths but others may demand the same respect for atheism. The demand normally is that the state must treat all its citizens equally. This means that the state must neither favour nor discriminate against citizens on grounds of their religion.

The containment of religion in life and the separation of state from religion are universally accepted definitions of secularism, even though these ideas had a distinctly European origin. The third India-specific definition of secularism underlines the importance of the unity of all people against colonialism and communalism. A secular state and society were a part of the social vision of the Indian national movement. Hence, despite the horrendous violence in 1947 and the making of Pakistan ostensibly on religious lines, secularism remained the abiding principle and opposition to communalism was the chosen policy in Independent India (Chandra 2004: 3-29).

## 20.3 What is secularization?

The process by which the sphere of influence of religion was contained in institutions and human consciousness is secularization. Secularism is no longer an active movement in the West and hence, scholars there prefer to talk about secularization of institutions and human consciousness. Bryan Wilson defines secularization as the process in which social institutions gain 'considerable autonomy' and religious consciousness declines whereby instead of being the pervasive, determinant influence, religion becomes 'a department of the social order'. Wilson mentions the following three features of a secular society, viz. the prevalence of instrumental values, rational procedures and technological methods (Wilson 1987: 159-60). In his *The Secular City* Harvey Cox maintained that secularization was a consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation and that its characteristics were urbanization, pragmatism or lack of interest in the mystery of life, profanity or this-worldliness, pluralism and tolerance due to which no world-view is imposed on anyone (Cox 1966:2-3). Peter Berger defined secularization as the 'process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols' (Berger 1973:113).

secularism minimises the role of religion in the social and political affairs of society. The important processes of change triggered by secularisation, which comes in tow with modernity, are:

- 1) withdrawal of religion from such social spheres as education and marriage following a differentiation in institutions, structures and functions;
- 2) the development of pluralisms at the level of social groups (including religion) and world views;
- 3) rationalisation as described by Max Weber which refers to the emergence of a scientific, rational world view which 'disenchants' society from myths, mysteries, miracle and magic; and
- 4) the development of critical consciousness that reveals the ideologies hidden in the institutional and belief structures of religion (Alam 2002:106).

#### Box 20.1 Process of Secularization

The process of secularisation was greatly aided by transformation of human consciousness triggered by the popularisation of scientific ideas among common people. Secularism was the product of the Enlightenment which emphasized the autonomy of reason and science. The contributions of the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) who said the earth moves around the sun and was immediately condemned by the Church, the Italian Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) who suffered house arrest for life after the Catholic Church denounced him as a heretic because he endorsed the discovery that the earth moves around the sun, the German Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) who spoke of planetary bodies following some laws of motion and the English Issac Newton (1642-1727) who gave the laws of motion a sound footing by incorporating mass, force and gravity into them. Newton's book *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy) or *Principia* (1687) was popularized by Voltaire and its ideas that the world is governed by rational laws overflowed from science into philosophy and politics. *Principia*, therefore, became a major inspiration for the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment. All this together demolished biblical cosmology. Biblical worldview asserted that creation took place a few thousand years ago, that the earth was the centre of the universe, and that the entire creation was anthropomorphic (meaning human form was the measure for everything, whether God or animal). Astronomical time and space, on the other hand, reduced humans and their history to absolute insignificance.

Similarly, the theory about evolution demolished another dogma that the entire human species descended from one ancestor, viz. Adam and Eve. Charles Darwin (1809-1882), English naturalist, wrote to Karl Marx in 1880, 'It seems to me ... that direct arguments against Christianity or Theism hardly have any effect on the public; and that freedom of thought will best be promoted by that gradual enlightening of human understanding which follows the progress of science. I have therefore avoided writing about religion and have confined myself to science.' He is well known for his theory of evolution. He collected data during his round-the-globe trip on HMS *Beagle* in 1831-36 when he observed variations between related species on the Galapagos Islands. By 1837 Darwin had already concluded that species 'change' or 'evolve' over time through the appearance of new traits that slowly modify ancestral forms until their forms are distinctly different (Rohmann 1999: 89-90). There was opposition to the ideas of these scientists also around the same time. For instance, in USA, the state of Oklahoma passed the first anti-evolution law in 1923. This law

## 20.4 Theories of Secularism

Theories of secularism grew in a historical context of differing religious visions and acute strife among people having these differences. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1776), David Hume asked, 'If religion is salutary to society, why are its consequences so pernicious (like factions, civil wars, persecutions, subversions of government, oppression and slavery) to public affairs?' (Lorenzen (ed) 1995) The point of origin of modern secularism in Europe is the Crusades or rather 'the search in battle-fatigue and horror for a way out' of religious wars. Crusades, as we know, were a series of eight holy wars that took place between 1095 and 1464 ostensibly to reclaim the holy lands in Palestine from the Muslims. 'Rules of peace, even with heretics, and of obedience to legitimate authority, even where schismatic, had to be put beyond revocation in the name of one or other version of orthodoxy.' Two approaches were devised in those days to overcome religious hatred. One was the *common ground strategy* to establish the ethics of peaceful co-existence and political order. In giving their different versions of natural law, Aquinas, Pufendorf and Locke subscribed to this strategy of secularism. This strategy downplayed confessional dogma and highlighted common beliefs, and it could manifest in Deism (or the belief in one God which is in contrast with polytheism or atheism). This strategy appealed to people with different commitments to converge on certain fundamentals.

The second way devised to overcome religious conflict was to evolve an independent political ethic. Outside warring beliefs, this strategy proposes a political morality which provides a common basis for living together. Certain norms of peace and political obedience were deduced from features of the human condition. It was said that humans were rational creatures who were sociable and they would not violate any solemnly given word. Grotius is the celebrated earliest explorer of this strategy. He said 'even if God didn't exist, these norms would be binding on us' (Tuck 1979 pp 33-4).

Secularism, as an ideology, consists of the following five ideas. Firstly, it stresses the role of human autonomy. This means that secularism recognises the right of an individual to order her life independent of authority. The *Secular Humanist Declaration* declares, 'Secular humanism places trust in human intelligence, rather than divine guidance. Sceptical of theories of theories of redemption, damnation and reincarnation, secular humanist attempts to approach the human situation in realistic terms; human beings are responsible for their own destinies.' (Kurt 3 (n.d.) p 12)

Secondly, secularism asserts that not only state and laws but family relations, education, morality, knowledge and values are also completely free from the dominance of religion. The specific point in India, according to Marc Gallanter, is not to keep religion out of politics but to keep it out of social relations (Gallanter 1998).

Thirdly, secularism seeks not just the autonomy of the individual but also the autonomy of reason. Reason is made the sole criteria of truth and this undermines the faith in religion and the authority of the church.

Fourthly, secularism makes room for the values of pluralism and religious toleration because it does not make any religion final, infallible and beyond rational scrutiny. A plurality of religious world-views is therefore considered natural by secularists and tolerance is an attitude they value towards other religions and value systems.

Fifthly, secularism is not anti-religion. Instead, it is concerned with the affairs of this world and considers that secular life and knowledge is autonomous (Jhingran 1995: 46-9) People's Republic of China officially has a policy opposed to religion and going strictly by the definition of secularism, it is not a secular state.

## 20.5 The European experience

Secularism was the conscious affirmation of the goals of Reformation and the Renaissance which asserted the dignity of the person. The individual person was the concern of Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Martin Luther (1483-1546), the principal initiator of the Protestant Reformation, had advocated the individual's right to understand the word of God, independent of the Church. The problem, however, was that Reformation was basically a religious movement which later became quite reactionary. Two notable things about the Reformation were that it did not produce more toleration and religious liberty and that the popular masses/ illiterates were little influenced by the sophisticated controversies of the Reformation. Popular religion continued to be the folk religion. The biggest influence of Reformation was that Christianity was divided into several Churches, mostly into national churches. Political authorities tried not to formally recognize more than one Church but yet the universal Catholic Church gave place to several religious perspectives, bitterly opposing one another. The existence of different religious options did not entail a sense of toleration or religious liberty because all parties believed in the notion of objective truth and they claimed to be against the public expression of religious error (Hillerbrand 1987: 253).

The secularization process could be initiated only after non-metaphysical rational and scientific explanations were satisfactorily provided for the evolution of the universe and human life thereon. The Renaissance thinkers and astronomers, as noted above, challenged the theological visions of the cosmos. Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection confronted the Christian dogma about the earth being a creation of God and Adam and Eve being our common ancestors. The ideas produced by the astronomers and naturalists were confined to a few. The secularization process popularized them among people through publicity, viz. mass education, free press and social movements. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the great secularist campaigner, Charles Bradlaugh believed that extensive propaganda would ensure secularization. He held that secular ideas could be spread better not by playing on flutes but by the beating of drums (Chadwick 1985: 103)

### Secularization Process

The secularization process in the West, as also in India, took place in a specific social milieu. It had several distinctly national features. The struggle between feudal lords and the bourgeoisie took a religious form in England and in The Netherlands but not so in France (Havrilyuk 1984). It is necessary to take cognizance, howsoever briefly, of the social history of secularisation 'for we live not only in nature but in human society which has its history of development and science' (Engles and Marx 1976: 206). The feudal state had very close relations with religious institutions. Monarchs lavished revenue-free land grants on religious institutions and the latter endowed their feudal patrons with the 'Grace of God.' For a short duration in its fight with the feudal state, the bourgeoisie took recourse to science and rationality with an anti-religious edge. The demands of parishes were curtailed, a number of clerical establishments were liquidated, the staff of the clergy was reduced and the principle of election was instituted among clergy men. Practice of feudal privileges based on heredity,

oppression based on the will of the Sovereign and the 'Divine Right' of monarchs to rule was challenged on rational grounds. In the emerging modern nation-states, democracy was proclaimed and the rights of citizens were guaranteed through evolution as in England or through revolution as in France. One of these rights was the freedom of conscience.

Freedom of conscience is considered the 'voice of God within us' by theologians. Instead, the rationalists believe that conscience is a by-product of the development of society. They hold that freedom of conscience passed through three stages in its development. The first stage was when people struggled for religious tolerance in a confessional state. The second stage was when religious freedom of conscience was asserted in a liberal democratic polity. In the third stage genuine freedom of conscience was accomplished because atheism was freely allowed on the assumption that conscience is the yardstick of religion and not vice versa.

#### Action and Reflection 20.1

Talk to a cross section of people and ask them what is secularism and secularization. Note your discussion in your notebook.

Even before the current phase of globalisation, capitalist institutions, like the market, integrated vast areas and people in different parts of the world. But the capitalist social relations divided the large national states distinctly into what Disraeli called 'two nations', viz. the wage-earners and the capitalists. The wage earners were devoid of ownership of the means of production due to their poverty. After being paid a subsistence wage, these workers were alienated from the fruits of their labour due to the prevailing social relations. Hence, they grasped the conception of God and institutions of religion to compensate in imagination what they had lost in the real world. Religion was welcomed by them into their culture in order to make the conditions of the 'heartless world' slightly more bearable. On the other hand, capitalists needed religion to buffer the brutal uncertainties strewn in their lives, both as individuals and firms, busy with the task of accumulating capital. The capitalists may occasionally also need religion to be used as an instrument to pacify potential rebels among wage-earners. Ironically, therefore, the liberal state, dominated by the capitalists, also resorted to religion to bless its actions, crown its dictators, sanction its laws, define as just its war against its enemies or violence against its citizens and generally be the decorous master of national ceremonies.

#### Secularization and other Institutions

Secularisation also gave birth to a large mosaic of relations between socio-political institutions and religion in western Europe itself. Lutheranism is the established faith in the Nordic countries (like Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland) and Catholicism enjoys a privileged position, though is not the established faith, in Italy, Spain and Portugal. Church of England has never been the state church but it has enjoyed some privileges like 26 top most Anglican bishops have seats in the House of Lords and Anglican priests preside over most state ceremonies. Yet, the Church of England is subordinate to the British sovereign because s/he is also the supreme governor of the Church of England. France, though Catholic, has become rigidly secular since 1905 when the Catholic Church was disestablished. Now, the French Government shows no preference for any religious group and prohibits clerics from teaching in the public schools. Mexico, where Catholics formed 92% of the total population in 2000, has implemented the most anti-clerical legislation in the West. Here it is legislated that:

- Church property belongs to the state;
- Worship services outside the Church was forbidden till some years ago;
- The government can open any place of worship and determine the number of clerics permitted in it;
- The clergy cannot vote, participate in politics, wear vestments in public or criticize public officials; and
- The church cannot own radio and television stations (Storey and Utter eds 2002: XI-XII)

Capitalist societies can be divided into two main categories according to the nature of Church-State relations. The first category consists of those who have a declared State religion and in the 1980s their number was around four dozen or about a quarter of all countries of the world. In these countries only the adherents of the State religion could become the head of the State, member of high state institutions and participate in the management of State affairs. In the second category fall countries which have officially declared the separation of the State from any religion but in practice religion is present in the cultural life of the nations. Agencies of the State get involved with the religious ceremonies in the interests of public order, religious education is regulated in the interests of uniform educational standards and religious institutions are overseen in the interests of public good. The Indian case falls in this latter category where there is a formal separation but actual involvement of the State with religious affairs.

## 20.6 The Indian experience

Secularism is 'not an optional extra for a modern democracy,' it is a necessity. There are several religious and caste groups whose members wish to relate with each other on a pluralist but egalitarian basis. Pluralism existed in India during the medieval times as well but the challenge to pluralism in our times is different. In medieval times hierarchy, and not equality, was the norm. Hence, the diverse religions and cultures had to find their place in the social hierarchy. On the one hand, even a non-Hindu religious group like the Syrian Christians had to be fitted in the caste system as one more *jati* (Bayly 1989 Ch. 7). On the other hand, the prime source of legitimacy was the force of arms but the conquering groups (like Mughals, Marathas and Sikhs) also tried to exercise cultural hegemony. The ruling, dominant groups would tolerate, even subsidize, different faiths provided the others publicly accepted their power. Bayly found that, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the dominant cultural groups of UP (whether the Muslim gentry in small towns or the Hindu merchants in Benaras) set the limits within which other cultural groups found their rights (Bayly 1983: 335-8). In modern times, all seek equal rights and no one would like to exercise them as a courtesy showered on them after bowing to the power of some dominant cultural group. Hence, there is a demand that the rights of people be equal and that they be engraved in law formulated by popular vote.

### Colonial Impact

The European marvel of secularism hinged on Renaissance thought and industrial capitalism. The Indian secular experience is different from the European marvel due to colonialism. Colonialism, as we know, was not chosen by Indians but was foisted on India aggressively since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Colonialism had a debilitating impact on both the development of Renaissance-like thought and industrial capitalism in India. Sushobhan Sarkar

said the Renaissance in Bengal, which was the leader of India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was partial and artificial. He noted two vital differences between the Indian and European forms of Renaissance. Firstly, the European Renaissance flourished in free and independent states whereas the Indian Renaissance struggled to make its appearance in a colonial situation of foreign conquest and domination. Secondly, the European Renaissance liberated the mind but this liberation was a part of a magnificent process in which Europe ‘discovered’ the world. The world witnessed a revolution in religion, the foundation of modern science, the rise of centralised states, a beginning of the break up of the old social system in which the bourgeoisie limited the power of monarchs, and the reorganisation of trade, industry and agriculture. The Indian Renaissance did not have any such sweep or vitality (Sarkar 1970: 149-50).

#### Box 20.2 The Salad Bowl

In India, after the revolt of 1857, the colonial state pulled itself out of the Utilitarian inspired, William Bentinck-led social reforms. Instead, by playing one religion and caste against another, the colonial state tried to practice the policy of ‘divide and rule’ so as to kill the possibility of a united opposition to it. Hence, the anti-colonial nationalists became the torch-bearers of secularism, social reform, national unity and much else. In the context of secularism, these nationalists were inspired by three distinct ideals. Firstly, they drew inspiration from modern western thought and especially from the English industrial and French political revolutions. Secondly, the Indian religious reformation also helped the nationalists to initially draw people into public activity and to conceptualise a future better than the ‘oppressive present.’ Thirdly, India is and was a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. The nationalist strategy of ‘unity in diversity’ served the political ideal of national unity just as well as it gave a boost to the secular ideal of a society with tolerance towards differences and of a culture which was a composite ‘salad bowl’, not a melting pot. In a ‘salad bowl’ each item retains its uniqueness but is also a part of whole. Similarly, the different socio-cultural groups retain their respective identities but also form a part of a bigger politico-economic entity called the Indian nation.

#### Secularism and Religion

In the context of secularisation, there has been a considerable debate about the suitability of the concept and practice of secularism in India and the differences between Gandhi and Nehru on this issue. T.N. Madan in his ‘Secularism in its Place’ makes a guarded attack on modernization. He says that secularism and Indian culture are mismatched due to two reasons. He said the mainstream Enlightenment view was that religion is irrational. If secularism wants to remove religion from Indian public life and culture, this will not happen. Secondly, Madan says that no religion would go away on eviction. In fact there will be a strong cultural resistance if religion is forcibly evicted. Nehru did not adopt the forcible eviction model of Turkey but Nehruvian ideologues tried to use state institutions for attaining secular objectives. They failed and some of the responsibility for the eruption of religious bigotry and communal violence must be laid at their door, said Madan (Madan 1991: 398).

To counter bigotry and intolerance, Madan offers two incompatible proposals. First, he wants that nobody should demand the removal of religion from public life. He wants the resources of every religion to be used for spreading tolerance and fighting fanaticism. Second, Madan wants the available versions of secularism to be rejected and, in their place, he

would like to have 'a modern secularism appropriate to the cultural context of India' (Bhargava 1998: 524).

Ashis Nandy has made a flamboyant and sweeping attack on Modernization. He distinguishes religion as faith from religion as ideology. Religion as faith is 'a way of life, a tradition which is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural.' Religion as ideology, on the other hand, is a 'subnational, national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic, interests' (Nandy 1991: 398). Modernization produces religion as ideology and then generates secularism to meet its challenge. Nandy says modern scientific nationalist secularism is in crisis. He says that in places where religion has immense importance it is not possible to make religion a matter of private preference. Religion inevitably enters public life through the back door and this leads to communalization of politics. On the other hand, Nandy observed, secularism has turned into an intolerant ideology with modernization, development, scientific growth and nation-building as its allies or constituents. This secularism alienates believers and breeds both old and new kinds of violence. Such secularism breeds old violence in the form of backlash of marginalized believers which in turn reinvigorates bigotry and fanaticism. Secondly, this secularism generates new violence between nation-state and religious communities.

### **Notions of Secularism**

Like Madan, Nandy also wants the rejection of secularism and inclusion of notions of tolerance existing in different faiths of India. Nandy says that there exist two notions of secularism. One is the standard Western one which keeps religion out of politics. The second alternative, non-Western secularism must have space for continuous dialogue among religious traditions and among the religious and the secular. This Nandy felt might lead each of the major faiths in the region to include within it an in-house version of other faiths which in turn will encourage internal criticisms and remind one of the diversity in the theories of transcendence (Bhargava 1998: 524-5). Nandy has two versions of secularism but only one version of modernity and that too negative. Hence, while Nandy rejects modernity and the modern notion of secularism, he is left with tolerance of traditional religions to defend his secularism with.

Madan and Nandy make an effective critique of hysterical anti-religiosity and the hyper-substantive secularism which excludes religion from public life. They would not like to privatize religion and rationalize politics. They criticize secularism for being invalid in circumstances where religion is of immense importance to people. The fact is that modern secularism arose because tolerance of traditional religion was exhausted and religious beliefs had become a reason for conflict. When these religions are faltering again, we cannot return to religion whose resources have proven inadequate in the past.

Modern culture is a mixed bag and its outright rejection may not be the best way to have secularism. On the one hand, modern culture has some frightening flaws like a drive to control; a purely instrumental and destructive stance towards nature and human life, towards poor, marginalized sections and victims of the savage side of capitalism; disorientation and a felt lack of meaning; a trivialization of freedom in consumer choice; and a confused hedonism. On the other hand, modern culture also promises great goods like freedom, human rights, democracy, the right to be different, and great movements for peace and human welfare on a global scale (such as Amnesty International and Medicins Sans Frontieres) (Taylor 2006 p 7).

**Box 20.3 Tradition and Secularism**

This brings us to the question as to what differences did Gandhi and Nehru have on the question of modernity, tradition and secularism. Nehru is seen as the modern monster and Gandhi is portrayed as a blind propagator of tradition. Both were deeply involved with changing Indian society and none of them was unmindful of its vast cultural treasures. They were not satisfied with any textbook definition of secularism. Gandhi's definition of secularism included respect for all religions but neutrality towards all forms of spiritual beliefs, including atheism. He changed the proposition 'God is Truth' to 'Truth is God' and performed the marriage of the daughter of an atheist disciple, Prof. Gora, in the name of Truth. When objections were raised, Gandhi had the invocation to God dropped from the Congress pledge in 1925 (Chandra 2004:3-23). Nehru not only led the struggle for Indian Independence but also had to venture into nation-building. His conception of secularism included religious pluralism, full civil liberties and equal opportunities. Not just tolerance, Nehru emphasised equality and suggested that his task was to build a modern state within the framework of India's culture (Gopal 1996: 209).

It is thought that Gandhi would have wanted the sacred to pervade the secular sphere and Nehru would have nothing to do with it. Facts are very different from this impression. Gandhi was a deeply religious man but he did not want Hinduism to interfere with secular political matters, especially those of State policy. In his *My Experiments with Truth* he wrote, 'My devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics... those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion means.' (Gandhi, 1929: 591). Gandhi even called his Non-Cooperation Movement, in 1920-21, 'a religious, purifying movement' and as a 'religious effort' (Young India, 1929: 14). He believed that politics cannot be divorced from politics because he wanted religion to pervade every action of human beings. But, in 1940, Gandhi declared, '...Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe...This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc.' (Harijan, 1940: 177-8). But, with the experience of cantankerous debates and horrific violence in the name of religion, since the 1940s, the same Gandhi demanded that religion be kept out of politics. At the time of the Quit India Movement, in August 1942, Gandhi said, 'Religion is a personal matter and should have no place in politics' (Harijan 1942:402). In September 1946, Gandhi told a missionary, 'If I were a dictator, religion and state would be separate. I swear by my religion. I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The state has nothing to do with it' (Harijan 1946). Less than three weeks before his assassination by a Hindu communalist, Gandhi told people at a prayer meeting on 11 January 1948 that 'he wanted all nationalists not to mix religion with politics. They were Indians first and last in all secular matters. Religion was a personal affair of the individual concerned' (Tendulkar 1969: 240).

## 20.7 Conclusion

Much is made of the agnosticism and anti-religiosity of Nehru. But it is often not understood that 'Nehru was without religious faith but not without religious feeling.' He praised sages and savants and agreed with Vinoba Bhave that the days of politics and religion had been replaced by the days of science and spirituality (Gopal 1996: 208-209). He appreciated the value of religious epics in the life and culture of India. In his foreword to N. Chandrasekhara Aiyer's *Valmiki Ramayana*, Nehru acknowledged that the epic 'must have peculiar virtue in it' because it had a 'powerful

influence on millions of people, during some millennia of our changing history.' Nehru underlined the importance of seeing the whole of India (and not just a part) to have a full picture of her and of appreciating the deep roots of her past (and not just see the present) to understand her. He said an intellectual understanding of history is necessary but 'we must have even more an emotional awareness of our past and the present.' Nehru added that to understand India and her people fully it is necessary to have a 'knowledge of the two magnificent epics that are India's pride and treasure' (Nehru 1954). Barely two days before his death, Nehru asserted that India should increase production by modern industrial processes 'but in doing so we must not forget that the essential objective to be aimed at is the quality of the individual and the concept of *dharma* underlying it' (Gopal 1996: 209).

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## **Unit 21**

# **Communalism and Fundamentalism**

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- 21.8 Conclusion
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### **Learning Objectives**

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- define fundamentalism;
- define communalism;
- outline the nexus between fundamentalism and communalism; and
- locate the targets of fundamentalism and communalism.

### **21.1 Introduction**

There is a recent tendency, quite wrong though, to equate religious fundamentalism with communalism or to treat one as the synonym of the other. In fact, the two are quite distinct and different though they can become correlated and have many ideological and political elements in common.

### **21.2 Definition of Fundamentalism**

Let us first take up the definition and basic tenets of fundamentalism. I am indebted to Sadik J. Al Azim's brilliant articles in South Asia Bulletin for my understanding as also delineation of fundamentalism. [ the Bulletin, Vol. XIII, Nos. 1-2, 1993, and Vol. XIV, No. 1, 1994]. Though fundamentalism is not monolithic, it has enough common elements for us to try to define it. It is also not confined to the followers of any one religion and is to be found among Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Sikhs, though its strength among followers of different religions varies for historical reasons in terms of time and space and the formation and structure of different religions.

First of all, the fundamentalists argue for return to the fundamental tenets of a religion, for return to the original formulations and meanings given to a religion at the time of its foundation in its first texts. These texts have, moreover, to be literally understood, applied or implemented. There is to be no interpretation of or debate about their meanings. Consequently, all later developments, exegeses, interpretations, etc., are to be rejected and wiped out. Since the texts are seen as God's own

actual words, their meaning is bound to be clear and unambiguous as also changeless. How can then they be interpreted? And, of course, the question of later generations thinking originally does not arise. Thus for Christian fundamentalists, God's words are permanently given in the Old and New Testaments and for the Muslim fundamentalists in the Koran and the Sunnah (The Prophet's sayings). Some Hindus regard the Vedas as God's immutable words. Similarly, many Sikhs so regard the Gurbani. In fact the fundamentalists regard all efforts to interpret, not to speak to amend, the original texts in the light of modern social conditions and state of human knowledge as blasphemous, as acts of enemies within. And, of course, any effort to read them as mytho-realities or allegories is damned as worse than heresy.

Second, fundamentalists assert that all aspects and areas of life are to be governed by the true, revealed religion as embodied in the original texts. God's words and law are to be the basis of society, economy, polity, culture, and law and the entire domestic and personal life of the believer.

### Some Examples

As Gary North, one of the American fundamentalists, has put it, the Bible contains answers to all problems a person faces today including "the concrete, day-to-day problems of economics, family relationships, politics, law, medicine, and all other areas of life". Similarly, Judge Abdul-Jawed Yasin rejects the modern secular notion that religion pertains only to one area of a person's life, that is, his personal spiritual life. It is wrong to hold, he says, that "just as there are economic affairs, social affairs, political affairs, foreign affairs, family affairs, legal affairs, administrative affairs...there are religious affairs too... confined to rituals and piety." This, he says, reduces religion to "a mere aspect among life's many aspects" and to "a mere specific need among man's many other needs". "Religion," he argues, "is not a side affair among life's many affairs, but the divine 'way' according to which man runs his individual and collective affairs of life. It is the method drawn by God for the community: for its economic affairs, social affairs, political affairs, legislative affairs, psychological affairs, internal affairs, external affairs and any other affairs that it may have." A Muslim fundamentalist has put this view as follows: "God's final religion contains all the legislations required

Essays 'on Contemporary India by any society, any place, any time and in all spheres of life". The fundamentalists consequently totally reject the pluralist principle of "many Gods, many moralities, many laws"

### 21.3 Politics Religion and Education

More specifically, the fundamentalists attack the separation of religion from politics and state, and therefore the idea of the secular state. If God is supreme over all, then the political rule is also His domain, and how can then the state be outside the religious realm? The state, in fact, has to be a theocracy.

Similarly, the fundamentalists insist on religious control over education so that not only is true religion taught in schools and colleges but nothing contrary to it is taught. The famous encyclical, The Syllabus of Modern Errors, issued by Pope Rius IX in 1864, and one of the first modern statements of religious fundamentalism, after damning the view "that from civil law descend and depend all the rights of parents over their children, and above all, the right of instructing and educating them", condemns those "most false teachers" who "endeavour to eliminate the salutary teaching and influence of the Catholic Church from the instruction

and education of youth, and miserably to infect and deprave by every pernicious error and vice the tender and pliant minds of youth". The fundamentalists, therefore, advocate boycott of modern state-run or state-supported schools and their replacement by schools where the traditional religious system of teaching is followed. Some even argue that only that much education is needed as is sufficient to read and follow religious texts or to meet "a practical and real need" in terms of worldly affairs.

In particular, all laws have to be derived from the earliest or founding texts. The Muslim fundamentalists, in particular, demand that all laws must be derived from the Koran and the Sunnah. Even here, the fundamentalists tend to emphasize primarily the harsh ancient penal codes, such as amputation of hands and feet, stoning of the guilty, public flogging, and death punishment for a large number of crimes, some quite petty. For example, some of the American fundamentalists advocate death penalty for the following crimes, among other crimes, on the basis of Mosaic, i.e., God's Laws in the Old Testament: "murder, adultery, unchastity, sodomy, bestiality, homosexuality, rape, incest, fornication, incorrigibility in children, Sabbath breaking, kidnapping, apostasy, idolatory, blasphemy, sacrificing to false Gods, propagating false doctrines, false pretension to prophecy, witchcraft and sorcery".

## 21.4 Fundamentalism and Equality of Religions

The fundamentalists do not believe in the equality of all religions or even the grant of liberty to all religions to exist, for how can false religions be treated as equal to the true religion or be given the liberty to preach and practise falsehood? The same logic leads the fundamentalists to oppose the concept of the unity of all religions. In fact, most of them urge the prohibition and suppression of religions other than their own in countries where 6 followers of their religion constitute the majority. One slightly different but in fact the same aspect of this is the demand of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad that all Islamic religious or cultural influences should be removed from the country. Of course, missing the irony or the absurdity of the situation, the fundamentalists demand the liberty to preach and practise their own religion where they happen to be in a minority. They also, in that case, often demand separation of the state from religion, i.e. , the religion of the majority.

We may also take note of a few other features of fundamentalism. It is opposed to reason and rationalism, humanism and secularism. It is anti-science and denies the validity of all human knowledge which is outside the religious realm. As Prof. SadikJ.Al-Azim has pointed out: "Both (Christian and Muslim fundamentalists) invest efforts in what they call the re-Christianization and/or re-Islamization of human knowledge. As a consequence, both find themselves compelled to elaborate theories about and concoct recipes of Biblico-Christian and/or Koranico-Muslim foundations and principles of natural science, economics, history, law, government, politics, sociology, psychology, and so on." In India, the Hindu fundamentalists have been, in the last few years, making claims for Hindu mathematics and so on.

### Sovereignty and Religion

The fundamentalists are also opposed to the idea of popular sovereignty and the resulting practice of democracy and

constitutional government. This is, in a way, inevitable, for if sovereignty belongs to God and all laws and policies should be based on God's words as

revealed in the holy texts, then where is the scope for constitutions and for the people to determine

Communalism and  
Fundamentalism

#### Box 21.1 The True Believers

There can also not exist more than one party—the party of God or the true believers. In general the fundamentalists attack the basic ideas and values of the Enlightenment, especially modern science, reason and the idea of progress, often for being western, and, in the case of Christian fundamentalists, for being pagan in origin and for their claim to be independent of faith.

Before I take up the question of communalism I would like to enter a few caveats, though without elaboration. Even though sharing some common features, fundamentalism is different from devout belief, or religiosity or religious orthodoxy, or belief in the fundamental beliefs and values of one's religion. For the religiously orthodox are not intolerant of others' religious beliefs. Take, for example, both the firmness of religious belief and the high degree of catholicity towards others' beliefs among the Sufis and Vaishnavites in our own country. In fact, both would be declared to be 'practitioners of error' by the fundamentalists of their own religions.

## 21.5 Definition of Communalism

Let us now define communalism. This is best done historically, that is by a study of its development in modern India. Communalism in India developed through three stages, each stage providing its own definition of communalism and merging into the next stage.

Communalism developed during the last quarter of the 19th century when the view was put forward that followers of a religion in the whole of India have in common not only their religion and religious interests but also some political, economic, social and cultural interests. This view led to the notion that in India, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians form distinct communities and that India or the Indian nation is formed by these distinct communities. These communities have their own leaders, for example, Hindu leaders and Muslim leaders, who defend and fight for the interests of their communities. Unfortunately many nationalists accepted and began to use the terminology of religion-based communities even when they did not accept its basic communal content. Thus they talked and wrote about Hindu community, Muslim community, etc. Communalism entered a second stage in the beginning of the 20th century, when communalism proper made an appearance.

#### Action and Reflection 21.1

Differentiate between fundamentalisms and communalism on the basis of newspaper and media reports. Put down your findings in a notebook.

The communalists now argued that followers of a religion have, as a community, some interests separate from those of the followers of other religions; that is, many of the economic and political interests of the followers of different religions diverge and are sometimes opposite because of their following different religions. At the same time, the communalists agreed that Indians, belonging to different religions, also have many common economic and political interests, in particular vis-à-vis the colonial rulers. Thus, these communalists, who may be described as liberal communalists, accepted that Hindus and Muslims have common interests; but, they argued that, as communities, they have additional and separate interests of their own. They usually held that Indians can and should fight together for political freedom and economic development, once their

separate communal interests are recognized and adjusted or settled through mutual compromise and give and take.

### **Two Nation Theory**

Communalists of the third stage argued that the secular interests of the followers of different religions were not only different, but mutually totally antagonistic. What was good for Hindus was bad for Muslims, what was good for Muslims was bad for Hindus and so on. Hindus and Muslims could never form one nation or live together as equals and fellow-citizens—there was nothing in life to unite them. Thus was born the two-nation theory in its two communal versions. According to the Muslim League and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Hindus and Muslims in India formed two different nations because they followed two different religions—and the two must separate and form two separate nation-states because their interests clashed totally. According to the Hindu communal version of the two-nation theory, put forward by V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, Hindus alone formed or constituted the Indian nation. Muslims were not a part of this nation, and they should, therefore, live in India not as equal citizens but on the sufferance of Hindus and as perpetual foreigners. As is clear, there was no difference between the Hindu and Muslim communalists' conception of the nation or citizenship and they both in effect adopted a two-nation theory. The two communalists now talked the language of animosity and warfare towards the followers of other religions. They spread hatred among the people and cultivated feelings of violence.

## **21.6 Fundamentalism and Communalism**

As pointed out in the beginning, fundamentalism and communalism have certain ideological elements in common. On the other hand, they also differ from each other. Both attack the concept of separation of religion from politics and the state. Both oppose the concept of equal truth in all religions or the unity of different religions. Both advocate control over education by the followers of the dominant religion. Both believe in restoration of the past values and 'greatness' rather than in progress towards the unknown so that 'greatness' and progress lie in the future. Both share the notion that their societies had achieved near-human perfection in the very early centuries when their religions were founded and were practised in their pristine purity and then declined and 'fell'. Both oppose secularism and believe that it corrupts society. Both oppose secular nationalism and the anti-imperialist and nationalist view of his

But these common features do not make the two the same. To take a very different example, it is clear that indigenous and post-modernism have many ideological positions in common with fundamentalism, especially opposition to science, reason, progress, secularism and nationalism, but they are basically poles apart.

### **Differences of Perception**

The communalist and the fundamentalist differ in many ways, though in a multi-religious society a fundamentalist tends to be communal while communalists are quite often not fundamentalists. For example, in India, the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Muslim League, and the Akali Dal were and are communal parties but they were not and are not fundamentalist. Similarly, Pakistan and to a certain extent Bangladesh are communal states but they are no fundamentalist states. If we look at the programmatic, policy or ideological statements and propaganda of the communal parties, the difference becomes clear, for not many of the fundamentalist tenets would be found in them.

**Box 21.2 The Manusmriti**

Let me take up a few examples. Modern science is quite compatible with communalism, though the fundamentalists see it as an enemy. The fundamentalists oppose any notion of reform or further development of religious beliefs and tenets or social structure, practices and institutions based on them. The communalists can and often do favour reform of inherited religions and social structures. This is, in particular, true of Hindu communalists. The basic, fundamental tenet of Hinduism is the caste system and the basic social text is Manusmriti. There is little in the Vedas or Upanishads or Geeta on which a fundamentalist can build a full structure. Manusmriti is perhaps the only such text. Yet hardly any Hindu communalist is committed to it or to the caste system in a fundamentalist manner. In fact, except for a handful of die-hard priests, hardly any Hindu communalist today defends the caste system and its basic inequitous features or claims to live by the diktats of the Manusmriti.

The fundamentalists seriously urge the actual revival of the pristine past and its religious, social, cultural, legal and political practices. This is not the case with the communalists who may appeal to the past as ideology or nostalgia but whose gaze is clearly fixed on the modern world.

The relationship of the fundamentalists and the communalists to religion is also only superficially similar. The former are deeply religious, their entire ideology relates to religion and they want to base the state, society, and daily life of the individual on religion. The communalists, on the other hand, have hardly much to do with religion, except that they base their politics on religious identity and thus use religion for the purposes of struggle for political power. The communal state is thus not necessarily a theocratic state. For example, even when declared to be Islamic states, Pakistan and Bangladesh are communal states and not theocratic states. Interestingly, only a minority of the communalists in Pakistan or Bangladesh demand the literal application of the ancient laws (according to the Shariah), and hardly any Hindu or Muslim communalist does so in India.

**Action and Reflection 21.2**

Talk to some knowledgeable people about fundamentalism and communalism with reference to religion. Note down your findings and then compare with 21.6 above.

Similarly, the fundamentalists want to Christianize or Islamize or Hinduize the whole world. Not so the communalists; they only want to communalize and can only communalize their own society.

It is, therefore, not accidental that in our country the communalists have often not only not been fundamentalists but have not been even religious. Thus M.A. Jinnah or Liaqat Ali Khan or Feroze Khan Noon were not very religious; and V.D. Savarkar was an atheist. And by no stretch of imagination can L.K. Advani, Bal Thackeray or Atal Behari Vajpayee be considered fundamentalists. In pre-independent India only the followers of Maulana Maudoodi among the Muslim communalists were fundamentalists, and, interestingly, they were opposed to the demand for the partition of India.

## 21.7 Targets of Fundamentalism and Communalism

The targets of fundamentalism and communalism are also very different. The fundamentalists basically target fellow believers who do not agree with them, while the targets of the communalists most often are the other religious communities.

There is a major critical reason why the communalists are seldom fundamentalists and can even oppose the latter. They make every attempt to communalize and unite the members of their religious community. That alone can bring them into political power, especially in a democratic polity. But it is in the very nature of fundamentalism to divide and constantly fragment the followers of a religion. This is for two reasons. First, not many can adopt fundamentalism in practice or even in belief. Second, by rigid definitions, they tend to exclude rather than include. Anyone who does not agree with their definition of true religion becomes a nonbeliever and, therefore, sooner or later an enemy. When i? they talk of annihilating the infidels, they are often referring to

their own co-religionists. In fact, such is their extreme religious fanaticism that they constantly divide among themselves to split and fragment.

The communalists, therefore, tend to shy away from fundamentalism. In fact, V.D. Savarkar coined the word 'Hindutva' to avoid emphasizing any religious definition of Hindu communalism, for, as he put it, seeing Hindu communalism through the eyes of any particular Hindu sectarian stand would divide and not unite Hindus. This is also why puccaArya Samajists forget all about Swami Dayanand's anti-idolatry dicta when taking up the cause of temples at Ayodhya or anywhere else.

## 21.8 Conclusion

In the end, let me explain why I believe that it is absolutely necessary to differentiate between fundamentalism and communalism. To confuse the two with one another is unscientific, but it is also politically extremely dangerous for it is then easy for the communalists, who pose the main danger to our democratic and secular polity and the unity of the nation and the people, to show that one part of the charge is wrong, that they are not fundamentalists. Moreover, because, for historical reasons, fundamentalism is and would remain weak among Hindus, while it is at present a strong phenomenon among Muslims, the Hindu communalists can and do argue that the Hindus cannot be fundamentalists and, therefore, communal while Muslims are prone to being both. The reality is that while Muslim communalism is rampant and is dangerous to both Muslims and the Indian polity, it is Hindu communalism which poses the main danger, the fascist danger, to the Indian people. Thus, to confuse fundamentalism with communalism is to provide the latter with an alibi.

It should also be clear by now that by not calling the communalists fundamentalists I am not praising them or giving them a good chit. The real reason to distinguish between the two is to know them better and, therefore, to fight them better. The two are to be opposed differently because they pose two different types of danger.

I may also very briefly explain why the confusion between the two terms has arisen. The western journalists and even academics started using the two terms synonymously because of the ease of expression; their readers do not understand what communalism means, while fundamentalism is a current coin. And we have borrowed the confusion because we seldom look western gift-horses in the mouth. And, not surprisingly, this is true even of those who are politically radical—because they continue t be ideologically colonized or compradore.

## 21.9 Further Reading

Engineer Asghar Ali and Moin Shakir (Ed) 1985 *Communalism in India*. New Delhi. Ajanta Publications.

Pandey Gyanendra 1990. The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India. Delhi. OUP

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## Unit 22

# Religious Conversion

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### Contents

- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Aspects of Religious Conversion
- 22.3 Religion and Conversion
- 22.4 The Contemporary Debate on Conversion
- 22.5 Conversion and the New Age Cults
- 22.6 Conclusion
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### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should:

- understand the conversion process;
- follow the present day position of conversion;
- know the sociology of the new age cults; and
- analyse the various aspects of conversion.

## 22.1 Introduction

This unit is about religious conversion, and it's various facets or dimensions. It will therefore be appropriate if we look into the shades of meaning that conversion conjures up in our minds. Conversion may be called a process of complete change from one set of religion, rituals and beliefs to another religion and its rituals and beliefs. It is evidently a major change for the convert and has its reverberations on the family and society at large. Conversion of the religious type has been going on since ages past and continues up to the present day. However it is only in contemporary times that religious conversion has become controversial and the general tendency is to try and put an end to conversion, especially conversion of the type in which various types of economic allurements are part of the deal to change or switch to another pattern of beliefs rites, rituals and world view.

Let us look into the meaning of conversion even if we cannot agree on exactly what it is and in fact the area within this conversion process is so great that it would not be possible to give or arrive at a definition that would be equally agreed to by all religions and religious specialists. Let us follow Malony on what the meaning of conversion itself is. This will make it much easier to understand what are the factors involved in it.

Conversion itself is a term with wide ramifications not just religious connotations. It covers the abandonment of one set of beliefs and rituals and transforming oneself to suit and be agreement with another set of beliefs rites and rituals. In the secular sphere however conversion is a concept that could apply to any serious shift of behaviour from one type or another. In fact we may make use of the concept in describing the conversion from one political party to another as the ideologies and activities of each political party is different. They have different beliefs

and ideologies and this means that the political convert has abandoned one set of belief and ritual patterns to another which could be diametrically opposite to that of the political party that has been abandoned. Similarly we can talk of people who have been for years adhering to one type of branded product, maybe a telephone company or a brand of car as converting to another brand when they exhibit this kind of behaviour. Malony cites the example of a long haired beatnik type of person abandoning that type of look with its belief patterns and converting into a well suited short haired person who is loyal to his new company where he or she is employed. Thus while conversion is applied mainly for religious connotations it is actually a general term when applied to many other significant life changes.

One significant strand of thought regarding religious conversions has to do with the convertee being subjected to mind control or brainwashing and thereby adopting an entirely different mind set. It is clear that some ideological shift to another set of ideologies is at the basis of many conversions. Yet it has been pointed out that such symptoms such as mind control and brainwashing are done in such a way that it is not obvious and done in a subtle way so that the person who has agreed to convert is hardly aware of it at the moment and may realize it much after the event. Thus a person may later regret his or her decision as soon as it starts becoming obvious to the person who has religiously converted that the new religion is not suiting him or her. By then he or she is already deeply involved in the new situation. Indeed here we may point out that there are various types of convert, ranging from the fully adapted convert to the convert who is still in two minds about his religious conversion. Another type of convert has constant doubts about his new religion and participates in the rituals and learns the beliefs only half heartedly. Yet another type of religious convert is such that even after they have converted to another religion have no capacity to continue in this new path and lapse back into their former religious beliefs. In terms of the mind control thesis we find that the success ratio is something that is very hard to estimate. Unless deep research is done we may find that conversion is further complicated by cases whose brainwashing doesn't sink in very deep and is only superficial. This often results in a relapse back to the former religions or an attempt to learn about the religion of conversion through the concepts of the former religion. There are yet another type of convert who may be called "religion surfers". This set of people are such that they convert from one religion to another, or one cult to another, staying with the new belief patterns and ideologies for a few months or years and then shifting their allegiances to another cult or religion, and go on indefinitely this way. Thus we may note even at this stage that the brainwashing thesis though attractive and even appropriate for some converts doesn't have the capacity to take in all converts because as we noted such propaganda or the teachings of the various religions and converts is not applicable to all the converts as they are of different types and capacities.

### Definition of Religion

Our next point is that as Malony points out following Lemert that religion itself can be defined as "people gathered around a transempirical idea". This clearly distinguishes religious conversion from any other kind of conversion although Malony believes that the dynamics of conversion remain the same in all cases of conversion sacred or secular. It has been pointed out that conversion starts when certain questions arise in the mind of the would be convert. Malony talks in terms of various predispositions which start the conversion process. These are as follows below:

- a) the attempt to find answers to the problems and tragedies in life through a religious mode
- b) a feeling of unhappiness and frustration that does not go away by any secular means
- c) the religion that one lives with is not deemed efficacious enough

Maloney feels that such attitudes lead the world be convert to start looking around for other avenues to solve his insecurity and attitudinal problems in terms of another religion or cult. In short a transempirical idea is sought for present day problems of the individual . Such people become very vulnerable to the process of conversion as their present belief systems have collapsed and are not giving them any relief. As such they become a catchment area for those who are looking for members for their cult or religion. Malony cites a most interesting example of how this is done. The religionists and cultists target precisely those people who are already vulnerable and offer them a way out of their dilemma by promising them heaven or swarga if they were to convert to their religion or cult. Insecurity, confusion, and mixed up beliefs lead many people to seek answers from other religions or cults than the one they were born into. Here we may point out that Rambo considers the study of these phenomena as very important because his research shows conversion to be destructively oriented. Again while we have been describing the catchment area of conversion as those people whose world has no meaning and they themselves are floundering in search of support, there are others who are going through a personal crisis in their lives. These people also seek to find the answer to their frustration by changing religions or cults and we pointed out that there are some who "surf" the total available area of religion and converting from one religion to another frequently and not stabilizing in any - such people could also be called "chronic converts"

## 22.2 Aspects of Religious Conversion

We find therefore that many of those who convert feel that they are in possession knowledge that is extraordinary enough to be labelled as the truth. A successful conversion thus makes a person very confident and there is sometimes a feeling of overconfidence, and an ability to be able to make quick decisions. Rambo is of the view that conversion is very important because it tends to be destructive of family and other groups because it is very hard for other members of the family and group to understand such a step as conversion to another faith or to one of the many cults that have mushroomed over the last two decades.

According to Rambo we may consider conversion to be a kind of disorientation. For example we may consider that if a person belonging to religion A, decides to convert to religion B, then he or she adopts the entire conceptual and ideological baggage of the new religion or the religion to which he or she is now converted. It is disorientation because the person has been reconditioned or reprogrammed to be able to be an active convert of the religion of adoption. We find that such reconditioning, programming, and the attempt at mind control does not seem to work for many converts who begin to feel in limbo. That is to say that they are between two stools and not on either one of them.

In fact such a step has the potential of disturbing not only the family but every group that the convert now moves in. It is hard to understand by the family and the community why anyone would take such a step. Thus we have a division of society as "procultist", and another section being that of the "anticultists". The procult lobby is such that they consist of

those people who condone the action of the convert while the anticultists are those that are vehemently opposed to the act of conversion. It is pointed out by Rambo that the fact of the matter is that most people do not convert but stay with their religious grouping. The people then who do convert are those that have conflicts of a serious nature in their life. One such conflict occurs when there are people who are of parentage of two different religions and hence Rambo points out that in such marriages of a mixed type with an inbuilt choice mechanism that the likelihood of seeking to convert to either one of them becomes serious. This conflict of two religions in one marriage creates a conflict situation which has to be resolved by conversion. Nevertheless this is considered to be a deviant response. The problem arises in that the society is not able to understand why anyone would like to convert to another religion. It is perplexing to those with whom they interact. Those who are witnesses to a conversion may sometimes be shocked at the change in the person who has converted. He or she bears a different personality and in many cases where proselytization is an aspect of conversion they cannot believe in the outlandish ideologies of the group to which a person or persons known to them have converted. This is one of the facts that makes the convert even more determined to pursue his or her new religion with a greater sense of commitment than ever before. Everything that a convert does is put under the scanner by family and society who is interested in pulling him back to the religion and grouping that he or she once belonged to. The fact of proselytizing cults are especially vehement that their teachings be propagated and that an important part of the converts activities includes attracting new recruits for their movement. Apart from this the various types of dress hairstyles clothes and conversation all make the convert an obvious part of the community. The anticultists insist that the convert has been brainwashed and his mind has been reprogrammed in a different way. They see such converted people as a threat to the social fabric of the family, community, and society at large and such people are naturally against anyone taking any such step and managing to be an integral part of the wider religious community.

#### Box 22.1 Responses to Conversion

So it is clear then that conversion is a complex issue. We find that the expectations from the convert vary with the group that he is interacting with. One type of expectation is that the change will be of attitudes, that is mainly intellectual and cognitive. They do not expect that the behaviour will undergo too many changes or transformations. In other types of groups the expectations will be largely one of the emotions. Yet another type of response to conversion in terms of expectations is that the converts will become involved with various type of ritual behaviour which may even be kept secret from the outside society.

#### Responses to Conversion

There are then many types of expectations and responses to conversion and there is no stereotypical response and there is no stereotypical convert. They remain individuals with a different mind set which has to be reinforced throughout their life with religious meetings, reading the books of the religion or cult converted to. As such the reconditioning of the convert continues to be reinforced by various belief patterns, rituals, discourses and sacred activities and duties. The situation becomes even more complex if the rituals of the new religion or cult demand setting aside a period of time for such esoteric practices such as meditation. That is to say a period or periods of the day when they have to set aside and cut themselves off from friend and family. Such a behaviour, where it is context specific may well be understood but when it is practiced on a daily basis supported

by esoteric arguments and beliefs, but in an alien context where the practice of meditation may mean something else it is bound to attract skeptical attention.

Rambo feels that despite a formal conversion the problem remains stable to a large extent until the practices like meditation or chants are practiced. Thus it is not only a question of the ideology of a cult or religious movement, but also the practices that are involved in them. It is only when they begin to practice the rituals that the beliefs will become ingrained and active in the persons life. However there is hardly any way to standardize expectations and responses apart from the types of response that we have mentioned above. However, this too is debated and some social scientists believe that belief is necessary and an inseparable adjunct to practice. In putting belief or practice in a sequence we may be making a mistake that has to be checked out for each convert. There is also the problem of how seriously the convert takes his new cult or religion and how fast he or she becomes alienated from it. The level and degree of sincerity are also a question that must be addressed here because it is only too clear that just as there are many approaches to a religion the degree of commitment to the new cult or religion also varies and we do not have any particular picture of a convert with which to set up a standard.

Rambo mentions that recent studies are now clearly pointing to the fact that the people who convert to another religion or to some cult are not victims of brainwashing or propaganda and are not victims in any sense of the word. Rather they want to get converted to the new religion and actively seek out opportunities to do so. We will examine the brainwashing thesis of conversion in another section and then examine it in further detail, but what is important here is that while the brainwashing thesis of conversion is an attractive tool with which to deal with the facts on hand it has a number of drawbacks and thinks in terms of victims to exotic and esoteric cults and religions. This as we have pointed out is not really the whole truth. However more on this later.

As regards why people convert this is due to many different motivations. This is because they feel it will enhance their self esteem and give them a more influential base from which to interact. Rambo says that there is no single motivation but the idea is to enhance pleasure and reduce pain. Sociologically speaking the convert as we pointed out is in a conflict situation. He or she may not feel "at home" in the society in which they are placed and therefore try to connect with it in such a manner that prestige and status are enhanced. There are different ways in which a convert is attracted to a new religion and cult and therefore some people are attracted by the conceptual systems, that is attracted intellectually while others may have a passionate feeling about conversion and so they approach it through the emotions. The fact of the matter is that different religions and different cults target those people who would be open to their suggestions in such a manner that to attract them is much easier. Consider a person who has just had a deep bereavement or has been recently divorced or lost a well paying job. The systems dominant religions are then spread out before him to take succour if the religion he or she is born into is not satisfying his or her cognitive expectations. The motivation then behind all other motivations is to find meaning in life which has been lost due to some unfortunate turn of events. In such an eventuality we find that a person is open to change. However here we enter into another caveat, and this is that of the "lost sheep", people who would convert to another religion many a time do not settle down with that religion or cult but go hunting for ever newer and more esoteric cults in search for the "lost Paradise". There is thus an element of dissonance in such cases.

### Box 22.2 Ethics and Conversion

The ethicality of conversion is yet another area of concern. Is it right to convert to another cult? Is not the convert committing as apostasy by abandoning his parent religion and moving on to another religion or cult? The question that then remains to be asked is whether the people who convert gain anything substantial by doing so?

### Four Sets of Variables

According to Rambo there are four sets of variables that occur when a person converts to another belief and practice system. These are as follows below:

- a) Sociologists agree that the convert is heavily influenced in his decision to convert by his community and his peer group the people that he meets with often and whose opinions he respects greatly. These friendship circles of kith and kin have a very deep bearing on his decision to convert. Thus the conversion comes about through contacts that are personal and only secondarily through written communication or impersonal propaganda.
- b) Further we find that the groups to which a person can convert are very clear that the convert has to establish a close relationship with their leader and meet as often as possible with other members of that group who have converted sometime earlier than him. This is one of the most important tenets of these groups because in a situation where the convert has gone into a minority religion or cult there is need for constant reconditioning and reprogramming which only other members of the sect or cult will be able to provide him. Thus conversion is a fragile process and the new belief patterns are to be reinforced by the discourses of the leader and all doubts and hesitations are sought to be cleared by the leader himself or one of his close representatives.
- c) Thirdly the overall world view of the convert changes or begins to change. This as Victor Turner has noted is done by the means of rituals specific to the new religion or cult. In fact such rituals provide the basis for strengthening beliefs, and confirming the convert in his new religion.
- d) Finally the role perception of the convert undergoes a change, and they are able to perceive in a different manner, and therefore their behaviour changes. Some may become very passionate about the conversion and even seek to work wholetime for the organization, donate money to it and so on.

### Reflection and Action 22.1

Interact with some of your neighbours and find out why they are pro or anti conversion. Put your findings on paper.

We may then say according to what we have written so far that there are three major types of people so far as religious conversion are concerned. They are:

- a) People with a positive attitude towards religious conversion. It is from this catchment area that most people convert for many reasons including dissatisfaction with their own religion and thereby with a lookout for any other form of ideology which would suit them. Such individuals are open to suggestion and are vulnerable to the proselitization campaigns of other religions or cults.

- b) People with a neutral attitude towards religious conversion. Such people are well entrenched in the religion of their birth. They do not see any reason to change and cannot understand why people want to change their religion whether it be to one of the major religions or a new age cult. Either way the topic does not interest them very much and they are neither pro or anti religious conversion. In short they have a tolerant attitude towards the freedom to exercise choice of religion. However such individuals do not want to get involved in the issue at all.
- c) People who are totally against conversion and feel that conversion is a conditioning process which the convert has to imbibe and internalize. Such people are those that evaluate and criticize conversions to other religions and cults. other than the religion of birth.

It should be clear by now that conversion is a complex and complicated phenomena which is capable of disturbing the life of the family and community. Let us then see some of the dynamics involved with religion and conversion.

## 22.3 Religion and Conversion

Before proceeding further let us clarify what we mean by a convert and what we mean by proselyte. These are two useful terms which will help us conceptualize the issue of religious conversion much better. A convert is a person who has adopted the beliefs and rituals of another religion or cult and owes allegiance to them and the umbrella religion or cult. On the other hand proselyte is term used for a person who has wholly absorbed the ideology and rituals of another, to him "new" religion.

Let us then see the position of some religions on the possibility and the dynamics of such religious conversion as we have been discussing. Let us first see what it is to convert to Judaism. On examination we find that the law of the Jews lays down precise guidelines for conversion to it. The process of such conversion is known as "giur". The guidelines to conversion state first of all that the conversion to the Jewish religion must follow a change of heart and not be so for pecuniary and political gains. Such conversion is then initiated by a faith flowering in the direction of the religion to be embraced. That is conversion is to be sought without thinking of gains of any kind. A convert to Judaism has to undergo a ritual circumcision, and commits himself to be obedient to the 613 commandments and the laws of the religion. Also in Judaism there is no room for conflicting ideologies and the convert must totally abandon his previous beliefs and rituals. Further the "mikvah" or the ritual immersion in a pool of water has to be undertaken. The convert also leaves his old name and identity behind and takes on a Jewish name to signify the break with the past religion. He or she is now considered to be in the new family and is a son or daughter of the patriarch Abraham.

### Differences in Conversion Procedure

Now let us see what are the differences between the Jewish and the Christian viewpoint on the conversion process. Judaism is in fact an entire culture and not just a religion. The Hebrew Bible is lenient towards the process of conversion and the convert is given special attention so that he can fit into the new lifestyle of the Jews and is helped overcome the feeling that he or she is a stranger. They have to be taught the new ways of behaving and comporting themselves. It is also a fact that since 300 CE Judaism stopped encouraging or welcoming converts to Judaism. We see then that in Orthodox and Conservative Judaism and those that still

conform are expected to conform to the rigours of Jewish religion. For example the Tanach or Hebrew Bible covers the history of the Jewish people in terms of their commitment to God. Judaism is more than a religion as it touches all aspects of the Jewish Civilization.

Christianity considers itself to be universal and this creates a fissure between itself and the Jewish religion. As a claim to universality we find that Christianity has to keep in mind its relations with other religions and cults. Christians believe that Christianity is an outcome of God's promise to Abraham as also to Israel, which would be a "blessing" to the nations of the world. This leads to further areas of exploration and has several implications. For the Jews the convert is basically adopted by the religion and the Jewish civilization but in Christianity the process of conversion is based on faith in the new religion of one's adoption. However there is an overlap here because like in Christianity in Judaism also the faith component is very clear, and has a social component in that the convert attends Christian churches and such other conglomerations from time to time.

### Box 22.3 Conversion to Christianity

What are the requirements for conversion to Christianity? In fact proselytization has been an intrinsic part of the Christian religion and Christians have since time immemorial not only accepted converts but is actually active in seeking them out. With its claim to universality Christianity has it as part of its charter to convert the entire world into Christians. Thus in the New Testament, Jesus commanded the Christians to go out to all parts of the world and convert them to Christianity. Thus evangelism has been part of Christianity since Christ's time itself. Here we find that according to the Christian faith that conversion is an act of God. No matter what is the type of evangelism it cannot make the holy spirit descend on a person who wants to convert until the grace of God that makes this a reality.

In the biblical times the disciples of Christ all were Jews. Christ even performed miracles for those not in their religion without they being converted in Christianity. In the early times of the Church there were many rules and regulations that the convert had to observe. Thus the Christian Baptism which requires dipping into water is similar to the Jewish requirement of a convert to dip into water which was the act when a "new" spirit descended into the convert. Christianity and Islam are both active in the field of preaching their faith and actively seeking converts to their religion.

We find that in the case of conversion to Islam, that the conversion to it is simple if one sincerely believes that Allah is the only God and that Muhammad is his messenger. If this shahada is taken the person may be considered a Muslim. The new convert then has to familiarise himself with the beliefs ideologies and rituals of Islam bit by bit to whatever extent the convert can do so.

Let us dwell now on conversion to the religions of the Asian subcontinent. Here the first fact to notice is that Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism do not preach but nevertheless allow people to join their fold in order to gain more members. The feeling in these religions is that all paths lead to the same truth. Here it is very important to note that these religions even allow a person to be multi religious. In Japan which is a Buddhist nation it is possible to follow both Buddhism and Shinto. In India there are some people who claim to be both Hindu and Buddhist, or both Hindu and Sikh. Such an attitude makes conversion unnecessary. But this does not apply to Soka Gakkai and ISKCON.

This brings us to an observation of how conversion works in the new religious movements and cults. These are in many ways the area of conversion and are also very active in preaching their faith and attracting members or adherents. This is also an area which is very controversial. Thus those with an anticult attitude tend to criticize these movements and even use strong words like thought reform or brainwashing of a potential convert until she or he is convinced totally that he or she is converting in his or her own interests. There are definite procedures of conversion but they are not made public and the converts are asked to keep the esoteric exercise and rituals a close secret. As such though we know that new age religions and cults do seek converts we cannot tell everything that a convert undergoes to be accepted. What we mean to say is that new age cults initiate their members to meditational and other activities of which the exact procedures to be followed are not revealed to the public at large. We may then say that conversion to new age cults is possible once their ideology and belief patterns have become internalized by the aspiring members. We also find that research has shown that where there is a lukewarm involvement in mainstream religion, the cults become active and the catchment area for converts is much higher. Interestingly we find that in the USA a disproportionately high number of converts to new religious movements are of Jewish origin.

In contrast to our arguments above we find that there are certain religions like the Yassidis and Zoroastrians do not believe in accepting any converts. The only way to acquire identity of these and such religions is by ascription that is to be born into them. On the other hand we also find that cults like the Shakers groups do not allow procreation so all their members have to be converts.

### **Proselytism**

A word here about proselytism would be in order. Proselytism is the effort to change the beliefs and actions of a person in order to change his religious point of view. Christians especially are active in proselytisation of potential converts and the Bible has given explicit permission, indeed a directive to do so. Thus in the Bible Jesus says "Go to all the Nations and make disciples. Baptise them and teach them my commands". This is also known as the Great Commission of Jesus.

We find that the views of people, groups and communities differ on the activities that come under proselytisation and evangelism. One view is that proselytisation and evangelism are part of the freedom of speech, and it is a justifiable activity. The other point of view is that such activities are harmful and derogatory and since they are a nuisance they should be disallowed. However if we consider this situation dispassionately we realize that there are several aspects to this conglomeration. These are:

- a) There should be freedom to change religion not just once but several times if the potential converts choose to do so. In such a freedom of religion the would be convert is not under any pressure to convert except by taking his own stand on the issues concerned;
- b) There should be freedom of association and all people must feel free to have religious inclinations and form a cult if they so desire. In fact it is this freedom of association which has led to the mushrooming of new and old cults;
- c) Further we have the freedom of speech caveat which allows people from new age cults to talk to others about their experiences and so be able to reach out and convert people to their beliefs and lifestyle.

Keeping these rights in mind it is clear to see that new age religious movements are here to stay and even strengthen and broaden their base. The very foundations of the conversion process are built into our modern society which has great stress and strain, and where often people lapse into meaninglessness by just following a mechanical routine which takes them from office to the home and back to the office. Thus it is also very clear that converts are intending to lead a meaningful and happy life and will not let anything stand in the way so far as their conversion processes are concerned.

Yet it can be argued that the very rights that we have been mentioning are a double edged sword, for my freedom cannot come in the way of your convenience or try to destroy the other person's belief system. As such there is little room for coercion and force in conversions, or to try and bait them by means of pecuniary benefits, health benefits and so on. Again there is the question of the "captive audience", which can be made to listen to any kind of evangelism and cannot avoid it. This happens in the case of the army or the classroom which should not be made an area to propagate one's views to those people who are then forced to listen.

#### Box 22.4 Conversion Controversy

Let us before going further recapitulate the facts that we have set before you. The question of religious conversion looms large before every religion. Some religions are very strict about conversion to the extent that their members are commanded to make new converts and much of the missionary work all around the world is based on this premise itself. Then there are religions or new religious movements which require converts to keep floating. We gave the example of the shakers who do not allow their followers to procreate and are thus entirely dependent on the conversion mode to stay afloat. There are furthermore religions in which conversion is a matter of choice and one can be a believer in more than one religion. Thus conversion remains a controversial area of endeavour and we shall see in the next section some reports that indicate that the controversy has far from died down and is at the centre of religious debates across the religions.

In Hinduism conversion is understood in a different way and is closely linked to the notion of karma - which is to say that those who convert have past birth tendency to do so. One can be a mainstream Hindu and yet at the same time believe in a cult and be a practicing member of it. In the following units you will notice that being a member of any cult is not regarded as an offence, and in fact many of these cults have been spreading a form of Hinduism itself all around the world. Thus there is a vast gap between the Hindu and the Christian viewpoint so far as conversion is concerned. In the case of Hinduism the member is born into the religion and there can be no converted Hindus. However in fact certain mass conversions to Buddhism have been advertised for the Dalits and others in India which are then followed by reconversion back into mainstream religion. That is many new religious movements do not pose a threat to mainstream religion and are in part a reinforcing mechanism. Thus for a Hindu it is easier to choose some new religious movement and not be in conflict because the basic ideology of karma, dharma and artha, do not come into conflict with the mainstream religion on which the cult does its own interpretations and reconditions the person to believe in the esoteric side of religion which is not evident at first sight in any religion. A case can be made out that the cults from India are in fact various takes of the mainstream religion and its text. Moreover it would also be very difficult to conceive of Bhagavad Gita, Vedas and so on as belonging to any specific cult, even though they may try to appropriate it for themselves and their members.

## 22.4 The Contemporary Debate on Conversion

Religious Conversion

We have been pointing out various facts about conversion till now but it may be pointed out that we should not miss the point that conversion to other religions is very controversial. Thus conversion to another religion by Hindus en masse is deemed to be very threatening. It is to this we now turn after providing an example of attitudes towards conversion in the Asian subcontinent.

Sri Lanka has expressed the interest that it would like to follow the Tamil Nadu Government which has passed an anti conversion legislation. The government of Sri Lanka is trying to pass a law to take punitive action on those who are attempting to convert people with various types of force or inducements. Indeed this is a very serious matter for to force a conversion with inducements is ethically wrong. In India itself religious conversion is a controversial process. When looked into superficially we may say that to change one's religion is a fundamental right. The argument goes further and argues that conversion to another religion is the only solution for the poor or dalits of India. It is mooted as the only way in which the dalits can join in the mainstream of the Indian nation. However this is a moot argument and there is no definite evidence that conversion is the answer to the plight of the dalits.

### Anti conversion Laws

On the other hand while there is pressure for anti conversion laws many religious leaders have been talking of scrapping any proposed anti conversion law. Thus many Christian, Hindu and Muslim religious leaders have gone on record saying that it is a human rights issue. They presented a memorandum to the President of India saying that anti conversion legislation is wholly in opposition to 'freedom of faith' that is guaranteed against the secular Constitution of India, and is also against the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

Turning once again to Sri Lanka we find that it is very serious about enacting an anti conversion bill into the parliament. The response to this move by international funding agencies such as the Becket fund was that if such a legislation went through and became law they would cut off tsunami related aid to the country. This is understandably so because the bill proposes up to seven years imprisonment to anyone found trying to convert people to another religion than the one he or she already has allegiance to. Becket Fund authorities have pointed out that such legislations would put gravely in danger any 'faith based' aid and relief at a point in time when it was gravely needed. In the case of Sri Lanka the Constitution does not guarantee any fundamental right to propagate a religion, and if such activities were taken up the conversions to Christianity would cause grave damage to Buddhism which is the dominant religion in Sri Lanka.

### Box 22.5 Ban on Religions Conversion

Similar concerns in India about Hinduism have been expressed by different quarters. In another case in Rajasthan the Rajasthan government wants to ban religious conversion. This stand became very clear following a Christian Mission's Meeting in Kota which is 155 miles from the state capital Jaipur. The foreign delegates were informed and warned that their visas did not permit them to join this gathering. On the other hand the Christian mission alleged that some of their members had been physically assaulted. The Hindu activists alleged that the Convention was being used as a cover for inducing religion conversions. They set up roadblocks on the way to Kota to

prevent the delegates from reaching their destination. It was pointed out by the Hindu activists that over 60 foreigners were at the Kota convention and they did not have the visa permit to be there. A day later Hindu activists had to be dispersed when they tried to prevent people entering the premises where the Convention was to be held. The emphasis as always was that the activists would not allow any poor and illiterate people from being converted. This example shows that religious conversion is a very seriously emotive issue as it involves abandoning one religion and joining another.

Some writers like Parmeshwaran have questioned the very morality of conversion so far as India is concerned. His fear is that Hindus, mainly illiterate and poor are being targeted by the Christian missionaries and being offered to convert to Christianity. What is more the missionaries are offering monetary and job inducements for making the converts. This is further no secret and the Christian missionaries have already spelled out their plans for conversion in the subcontinent. Thus Parameshwaran points out that this 'manifesto' of conversion is a basic policy so far as the Christian churches are concerned. The Christian churches have what is a common platform in evangelisation of the east. The agenda is to Christianize the entire world.

### Tribals in India

It is occasionally pointed out that most tribals in India are neither Hindu nor Christians and therefore they have the right to choose their religion. However the idea of 'buying' people by offering them various economic and job allurements is indeed a debatable procedure. Further the idea that the tribal population by large is not Hindu is controverted by the fact that tribals have been worshipping Hindu deities from the Hindu pantheon. The north east of India has received special attention from the missionaries and they have been very successful in that not only has the population taken up Christianity as beginners or acolytes but they have themselves produced a large number of missionaries. This is entirely in line with what is successful conversion, that is not only does a region convert to Christianity but they take to it with such enthusiasm that they themselves now want to convert others to their adopted religion.

We now turn to the final section of our unit and examine the 'brainwashing' thesis with regard to the new age cults, which though allied to the Hindu religion are in fact variations of the same with greater stress on activities like meditation. No doubt they too seek disciples and converts but the impact on the overall social fabric tends to be peaceful and even overall ameliorating to the rest of society.

## 22.5 Conversion and the New Age Cults

As we have noted earlier there are at least two points of view so far as cults in the new age are concerned. One is a positive or pro cult viewpoint, while the other is the anti cult viewpoint. In this section we are going to present and analyse one of the major anti cult theories which is also known as the 'brainwashing thesis' so far as cults are concerned. It is held by the votaries of the brainwashing thesis that cults and their members are involved in putting propaganda in the minds of susceptible individuals and thereby making them convert and become active members of that cult. In short the accusation is that cults exercise mind control over their members and that most converts have been made to see the cults point of view, which in turn renders them totally under the control of the leadership of the cult. In other words conversion into cults is involuntary and the cult membership is comprised of membership which has behavioural

and attitudinal changes induced using persuasion and propaganda. Such converts exhibit a reduction in autonomous behaviour and the assumption of a new identity based upon their new mind set. They also tend to show a dependency syndrome on the leadership of the cult and cult members. Some sociologists have asserted that this is very deleterious, and that 'psychospiritual' aspects of conversion, leads to a cult member to become mentally somewhat deficient and as a result not being able to concentrate or make independent decisions about his or her life. The indoctrination mechanisms are so strong that the new disciples show total commitment to their new group of allegiance.

#### Action and Reflection 22.2

Talk to some people who have changed their religion and note down why they converted.

This is also known as the extrinsic model of conversion, and it alleges that the disciples, acolytes and recruits are literally coerced into total allegiance to the cult's leader or leaders. The extrinsic model of conversion has several features basic to it and it is to this aspect that we now turn. To begin with Anthony and Robbins point out that the disciples are wholly in the power of the cult, and there is no question of the exercise of one's own decisions. This as we have noted is deleterious in itself as it makes inroads into the mind of the member and forces him to think along the lines of the cult ideology. Next is the extrinsic models total negation of the argument that there may be converts who were self motivated and joined the cult on their own motivation without any additional input from the cults propaganda machine. In other words this model indicates that there is no such thing as voluntary conversion into a cult. This is in fact taking an extreme stand on the issue of conversion because of all the members of a cult in the new age we find that there are surely a good percentage of converts who wanted to convert and the new conditioning was itself welcomed by them. That is to say they invited the cult philosophy to enter their mind in full cooperation to change their allegiances from their previous religious commitment to that of the cult that they have joined.

#### Extrinsic Model

Next the extrinsic model goes on to state that hypnosis and trance states are induced so that the would be convert becomes hyper suggestible and is easily able to adjust his or her viewpoint to fit that of the cult. Such hypnotic trances, the extrinsic model urges have severe consequences for the personality of the new convert and those who are already established part of the cult. These processes are allied with any other process which could be used to subjugate the member and to wholly set aside any notion of free will. This is especially so in the new age cults where it is the leadership of the cult which decides everything for the cult membership. The leader or teacher cannot have his decisions questioned or challenged and in the overall monarch or patriarch who takes care of the members desires and guides them through their difficulties and confusions for their own good. Part of the conditioning of the new age cults is that the teacher or guru is a wholly enlightened being and has direct access to the supernatural and is the sole route to salvation from suffering. Thus to posit a man or woman as the route to godhead or nirvana is itself a questionable attitude, but it is at the very basis of the other beliefs. Thus the first commitment that a convert makes is to regard the cult teacher as the primary influence in his or her life. There is no other person who has such exalted status in the life of a devotee than his or her spiritual teacher and his position in even higher than God whom he is in

direct touch with. As such this type of central attitude around which the entire cultic philosophy revolves can and has led to broken marriages and broken homes since the entire hierarchy of the converts social life is made mono minded in the centre of which stands the image of the guru.

Further the model explains that the very process of intellection is impaired by this type of extreme indoctrination where the guru or spiritual teacher is the most important person in a devotee's life. The normal way of thinking is thus subverted in a convert and he is unable to give up the crutch of the guru even though he is usually a distant figure to seen at discourses. One of the ploys that cult members use while indoctrination or brainwashing is that the teacher is available for consultations or removing doubts of a spiritual kind from the mind of a confused member. Over time the cult member realizes that he is only a cog in the propaganda machine and he is supposed to help in bringing more members into the fold alone. The guru is a distant figure who hardly knows even the names of those who are in the outer circle of the movement. Coupled with exotic customs and behaviour patterns these cults have their members even touching their foreheads on the feet of the teacher to show respect and allegiance to the movement. The process of intellection is thus twisted beyond recognition for those individual members who happen not to belong to a culture where such touching of feet of the patriarch and others is mandatory. The fact that these cultists follow such practices itself indicates that they have lost their free will and the power to think rationally. All explanations are subsumed to have been taken with the 'grace' of the guru and the whole idea in fact is to lay down or surrender one's entire life in the service of the guru or leader. Thus the cult members form in fact a kind of cadre which takes commands from above and has no rights but only obligations towards the leader and the other members.

The extrinsic model also indicates that this process of indoctrination ends up putting wrong ideas in the mind of their members who pose to be the chosen ones of the Lord and are destined for quick salvation unlike the people who are not part of their group. The point is that this is not done just at the occasion of indoctrination for membership but continues as and when members meet each other or gather together to hear discourses or discuss them. We can then say that indoctrination into cults is a lifelong procedure and continues from before the time the person was made to convert up until the very end of his or her association with the group.

#### Box 22.6 Conversion and Identity

Most importantly we find that the member's identity undergoes a change towards a cultic identity and moves away from what was his or her original or authentic identity. This last is a very strong indictment of the cult philosophy, which is that it destroys a person's very identity and makes him or her undergo a personality change which may not fit in with the home or work environment. There are many fallouts of such identity change and have led to many marital breakdowns and many a time in cult violence. This type of indoctrination and brainwashing thus damages the original personality of the member and tries to give him a new cultic self in which the whole way of thinking is skewed towards praising the leadership and organisation. The original self with its importance to family and relatives and friends is pushed over and there have been cases where those who were not able to properly make the transition to the new cultic self have actually gone mental, or shifted their allegiance to yet another cult where they feel they might fit in better.

How far can we go with this model of cultic conversion? Is this position wholly or partly correct? That is to say does a convert into a cult actually lose his mind or does he find his true identity in his role of disciple of the cult he has joined? It will be quite clear in the units that follow that each cult has its ideology and is in competition with many others at the same time. We will notice in these units that the brainwashing model does not apply to most members of the cults we have chosen to present in the units that follow. However the brainwashing argument though it cannot be taken too far has the germs of a critique of all authority since it is very clear that to belong to any organization or cult is a matter of acquiring the culture and the way of living and thinking that is prevalent. Further to posit that all converts are brainwashed is taking the argument too far as there are many confused people in the world who seek solace through one or the other of the cult philosophies. In such people there is no original self and it is easy for them to acquire a cultic personality entirely through their own efforts at meditation or chanting, yoga, sufism, and so on. So if there ever was an authentic self it would not get influenced by the ideology of a cult . It is only because most people and especially young people are in search of an authentic self that they venture into cultic areas. In this they are not always successful but some of them definitely do integrate into the thought support systems of the cults. It also gives them a father or mother figure to admire. It is surprising however that many a time the programming does not suit an individual or it is felt that the new area of cultic exploration may in fact be detrimental, and so they dissociate from the cult or do not go all the way in their convictions of the professed divinity of the leader of the cult.

## 22.6 Conclusion

We have seen in this unit that conversion to another religion or conversion into a cult is an area where there are many different viewpoints, even negative ones. However we need to distinguish the type of cult we are dealing with, and certainly there have been dangerous cults in the past and some of them continue to persist. Thus those cults that espouse violence as a way of life (or death) are obviously not beneficial to the social body. There are cults however that professes love, non violence, peace, tranquility and so on and have benign meditative procedures and respect shown to the teacher. Such cults it can be argued are all about providing meaning into the life of people who feel that they no longer have a mooring in their religion or that it is too large and impersonal. Such people find the benign cults (as against the malignant cults) to be a boon to them otherwise they would have nowhere to turn. In short far from being threatening the benign cults of which we will be presenting four in the forthcoming units, form a catchment area for those who would like to become more serious about their religious quest and go in for popular activities such as meditation and yoga and have a haven to retreat into. Moreover, the converts too are of different types, and those that are simply drifting or surfing cults soon drop out. Cults provide a very colourful part of religious endeavour and provide an opportunity for spiritual growth, and are instrumental in making people adjust not only to themselves but to the encapsulating society. As such no blanket statements can be made about cults as a whole and without doubt there are cults which have helped millions of people and will continue to do so. However we have already pointed out that we must separate with given criteria, the benign from the malignant cults and the serious cult members from those who are on the sidelines of the movement. There is no necessary seriality between joining a benign cult which is good both for the members and the encapsulating society, and mental breakdown, or loss of identity. It is only the malignant cults which have given the cults a questionable

status with some academics, but as a whole the benign cults are in fact an intrinsic part of the world social fabric and are here to grow and to stay. With this unit on religious conversion we invite you to the next four units of this block, which deal with benign cults that are doing a lot of good in the world, both North and South.

## 22.7 Further Reading

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## Unit 23

# Transcendental Meditation

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### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this Unit you should be able to:

- outline the world plan for TM;
- describe the relation between TM and religion;
- understand TM and scientific validation;
- define enlightenment and Natural Law;
- list some of Maharishi's writings on TM; and
- provide the various benefits accruing from the regular practice of TM.

### 23.1 Introduction

Transcendental Meditation is more popularly referred to as TM and is a form of meditation that has been taught and popularized by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. TM practitioners claim it to be of great benefit to them in every way physical or mental. It is described as a natural easy to practice type of meditation. TM it is believed has cumulative benefits and the greater the duration that the practitioner has meditated over the years the greater are the benefits to the individual and society. The origin of the TM Movement began in 1957 when at the end of a festival of spiritual luminaries to celebrate Sankaracharya Brahmanand Sarasvati, The Maharishi his foremost disciple announced and inaugurated a movement to regenerate and reinaugurate spirituality and spiritual accession the world. This may be considered to be the formal beginnings of TM. When the movement began in 1957 we find that the Maharishi underlined the religious aspects of TM. At first TM was subsumed under an organization called "Spiritual Regeneration Movement". This was however, was felt to be too loaded spiritually for a good foray into meditation. The need of the western environment was not that of another eastern ideology concerned with religion. What was required was a system of meditation that was secular in approach and skirted the question of religion and religious values to

some extent. This was because the 70's were a liberal decade in which the world-ethos was value -neutral so far as religion is concerned and the Maharishi did not want TM to be seen as a Eastern transplant onto western culture. He then began to focus on the scientific approach to meditation making it available and accessible to laboratory testing so far as, its efficacy was concerned. The idea in doing this was to show "theoretical parallels" with his ideology and also practical verification of the phenomena of TM. What was going to be verified was in fact the effect of TM on various stress related problems and increase in interactional skills.

## 23.2 The World Plan for TM

In the 70's itself Maharishi put forward that he called "The World plan" in which the idea was to have a TM centre for each million of the world population. In the early 1970's this proposal would mean that there should be at least 3,600 TM centres to be able to cater to the world population. This plan did take off but ultimately it was not very effective in terms of numbers. Further several of the TM centres that were opened did not remain functional beyond a certain point of time. In the contemporary world we find that TM centres exist all around the globe and it is estimated that over 5 million people have learned the technique. Further, since 1990 Maharishi has made Holland the area from which he coordinates his global programmes.

TM itself is to be practiced for two twenty minute sessions once in the morning and once in the evening while sitting with eyes closed. The TM technique has been described as comprising the "silent mental repetition" of a Sanskrit sound called a mantra. The mantra has to be repeated silently in the mind until the mind becomes more and more quiet. Only consciousness and the absence of thought define this meditative state.

This is the aim of the state of meditation and is called pure consciousness or Samadhi. Not only does the mind settle down and mental activity recede but it also has a profound impact upon the physical metabolism itself making it move into a very relaxed mode of being in consciousness. That is the body "settles" into deep relaxation. The tension from the body is released and then after a period of rest thoughts return to the body. This is known as the "outward stroke" of meditation. Following this stress releasing stroke the "inward stroke" starts again. This cycle is continued for the duration of the 20 minute meditation and is repeated many times. In other words, the mantra is used to silence the mind focusing on the inward breath and the outgoing breath while silently repeating the mantra. This causes the mind and the body to become very quiet and still and to reach a state of deep rest that is superconsciousness. The meditation has remarkable effects on the meditators as we shall see when we talk of the effects of TM. It has been proved by scientific laboratory tests that the TM form of meditation is scientifically valid. In the language of TM stress is described as "structural or material impurities resulting from overload on the physiology", which is psychosomatic- that is it involves both body and mind. The philosophy behind this is that total purification of the physiological is possible and that this leads to enlightenment itself. This needs a few words to explain and we will do so for the learner. Through the yoga of the body, which involves physical postures (Hathya yoga) it is possible to cleanse the body of impurities. Yet again through the meditation of mind or Rajya yoga it is possible to purify the mind. It is only when the body and mind are both purified that does it become possible to gain a state of enlightenment. In the case of TM both the positive and cleansing effects of Rajya and Hathya yoga are realised and a psychosomatic destressing and rejuvenation of mind is realised.

One of the central features of TM is the mantra itself. Mantra is a pattern of sound that has a particular resonant vibrant strong quality which can be and has been traditionally used. Thus, mantra becomes very important in the case of meditation since it must be a sound, that too a traditional sound that creates strength and goodness in the meditation. The TM practitioners however, simply maintain that mantras comprise meaningless sounds. These sounds which may or may not have a specific meaning outside a context are chosen especially for each and every meditator so that they may have beneficial effect upon the meditator. The TM mantras are chosen especially to have a soothing effect upon the nervous system of the meditator. In the entire list of mantras that have been used for meditators it was found that each mantra is the name of a Hindu god. This could be a problem for a meditator who is not a Hindu and professes another religion. TM sources however, claim that the mantras are not a religious adjunct and that meditation on any of them is not going to change anyone's religion.

### 23.3 TM and Religion

Then there is the question whether TM itself is actually a religion, a cult, a business organization, or a group that is teaching meditation to people of all religions. TM can be considered a religion since it involves spiritual changes and improvements in all participants. On the other hand, there are very few rituals and standardized worship involved in it. So there is no question of having faith in the mantra or Maharishi and again there is no question of worshipping the guru. However, it can be noted here that when a person is practicing TM meditation it is being done with the full authority of Maharishi. Further when good results of meditation begin to appear the meditator is grateful to the guru which is Maharishi. So, it must be noted that the Maharishi is a guru who popularized and taught TM.

#### Box 23.1 The TM Mantra

The TM practitioners have to keep their mantra a secret and not to divulge it to anyone and not to repeat it aloud because the mantra must be kept silent so that it can be more towards the inner spheres of the mind. The method for choosing mantra often depends on the age of a person at the time of the initiation and so the age is what decides a mantra will be. If a person gets initiated into TM at the age of 25 and then drops the practice for a few years, and then decides to take an initiation again the mantra will accordingly change. This is possibly because as the age of a person changes so does the spiritual vibration. As such to suit the vibrations of spirituality over the years the mantra would have to be changed.

The question comes up again and again—is TM a religion? The Maharishi is quite clear on this. He feels that

TM and religion are wholly compatible, they are both necessary and in fact he has gone to the extent of saying about religion and meditation that “one without the other will not survive”. This is clarified immediately by another statement, viz;

TM practitioners should follow their own religion. This goes to show that TM is religion neutral so far as its beneficial results are concerned and no one is asked to change his religion to become a practitioner of TM. Thus TM does not interfere with the practice and faith of any religion.

A third caveat in this line of reasoning is in the form of an unsubstantiated belief that religion at its outset, no matter which religion had TM at its

core. This is more in the realm of faith for this is almost impossible to prove. However, this is an important belief for TM. Following from this belief we come to the next one which is

The religions of today no longer even remember that once TM was their core and they have hence been regarded as a body from which the soul has departed. These statements of Maharishi make it amply clear that although TM is not a religion it is apparently the heart of all religion.

What does TM do? What are its effects? TM claims to destress individuals and make them more efficient in dealing with life-situations. It is not a programme to create recluses but is in the realm of karma yoga or the path of works. In the initial stages of research into TM many claims were made. Some of these claims seemed spectacular but nevertheless possible. For example it was claimed that if a minimum of 1 percent of the population of a town did TM its accident rates would drop dramatically and so would crime rates drop greatly. These were questioned. However, there is no denying the more major claims of lowering blood pressure, reducing cholesterol and the right way of reacting to stress have all been confirmed. Thus, TM aims to get closer to the higher consciousness through the practice of meditation. Transcendental Meditation is very much about reducing levels of stress and anxiety. That TM in fact does do this has been demonstrated by modern scientific laboratory research into the effects of the technique. Thus scientific research has proved and demonstrated that one of the most beneficial meditation techniques is TM. It was found that extreme reduction of stress and tension and anxiety made possible by TM is 3 to 4 times more effective than the same effect caused by other competing modes of meditation and stress reduction techniques which were examined. This is a remarkable finding for it provides for the first time scientific evidence for what is otherwise an uncollated TM experience. Also relevant is the fact that the Maharishi did not shy away from scientific examination and evaluation of his meditation technique. This bold new move by a contemporary guru is to be lauded as an all time achievement in the field of spirituality and meditation. No other meditation type apart from TM has had such rigorous tests done in the laboratory and none has succeeded like TM in spreading meditation. It takes great confidence and courage to subject what is essentially an area of inner consciousness to the anodes and cathodes of science to measure the effect. The remarkable fact is that the TM group passed these, scientific tests with flying colours. Some further remarks about science and TM. We find that TM has been taught by Maharishi and his authorized teachers since 1957. However, it took more than a decade before TM began to get a validation from scientific research. The initial articles about the "wonder" of TM were published circa 1970 in scientific journals and popular magazines including "Science" (167, 1970) "American Journal of Physiology" (221, 1971) and also the "Scientific American" (226, 1972). The research into TM was pioneered by two medicos from Harvard called Benson and Wallace and was made on "dozens" of TM practitioners. Further researches followed and articles appeared in "*International Journal of Neuroscience*"; "*Psychosomatic Medicine*"; "*Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology*"; "*Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*"; "*Journal of Clinical Psychology*" and so on.

## 23.4 The Practice of TM

At this point we may turn briefly to one of the problems with the marketing of TM in that it is very expensive and the price of TM is prohibitive and is more than most people can afford. At this point it is important to consider whether there is an 'elitist bias' in the marketing of TM. Now this can be

for many reasons including the scarcity of teachers relative to the demand. However, whatsoever the reason might be this economic factor in initiation into TM creates several effects. First only those who have the financial means and also a deep commitment would go in for TM. Secondly, we find that TM is more popular in the North Block of countries, US, UK, Europe, where the economic standards are higher than in the South including India, Afghanistan, Burma, Pakistan and so on. Thirdly and finally TM is inaccessible once again to the poor. They simply cannot afford it.

Let us turn now to some of the organizational facts of TM. This will take us inevitably to some of the remarkable achievements of Maharishi himself. We need to point out have that TM cannot be divorced from the ideas of Mahesh yogi because TM has been his brain child. Mahesh yogi the founder of TM is not simply a dreamer or visionary but a man of action. in the past 50 years of its existence over 5-6 million people have learned to do TM and are trying to improve their lines by doing 20 minutes of meditation morning and evening.

Mahesh yogi organization has trained about 40,000 TM teachers who function as initiators all over the world. He has opened thousands of teaching centres where TM is taught. He has also founded many schools, opened and inaugurated many of colleges and universities world wide. Further, there are meditation packages called Maharishi Vedic Science programs which are being extensively used and applied in the public organizations and institutions world-wide. As we have mentioned earlier Maharishi launched TM in 1957 and since then it gradually became a world wide, 'global organization'.

The role of Maharishi himself has been that of and ideator and facilitator. He has criss-crossed and circled the globe many times over teaching and preaching TM technique, writing books on TM, having consultations with government leaders and trying to see how TM movement could solve political problems national and international. He has also addressed many conferences of scientists, and people in the field of education, music and literature. It was in the year of 1961 when Mahesh yogi put into action his plan to teach trainers for his TM program. The training as conceived then has stood the test of time and remains a seven-step course. This is what is taught by the trainers to the initiates of TM.

In 1964 Maharishi's first book "Science of Being and Art of Living" was put into print. This book proved to be most popular and successful and has acquired the status of a classic. It has sold in millions in 15 different languages. The book remains as relevant today to seekers as ever and has been recently reprinted and reissued by Penguin Putnam. Two thousand teachers were trained in 1971 in the TM programme and a world plan was inaugurated to spread the programmes to every possible corner of the world. Here, again we witness the zeal of the Maharishi to bring enlightenment to all aspects of the functioning of global society in order to bring in and usher in the Age of Enlightenment. At present the TM organization is building Maharishi Peace Palaces in 3000 major cities to create more TM and to provide a means of peace in the world. Such palaces are meant to create a "general influence of peace" on a community and global basis.

### **23.5 TM: Scientific Validation**

One of the major areas where Maharishi literally risked his well earned reputation was to go in for scientific validation of the feelings and experiences of peace and bliss of the meditators. He felt that these meditational experiences of peace, bliss, deep rest and reduction of tension

and anxiety in meditators could be and should be scientifically proven or backed up, with scientific research. The initial results of this approach were first published in *Scientific American* in 1970, which is over a decade after the movement had started. Beginning with the 1970 research results TM has become the most scientifically probed meditation. It has become most thoroughly scrutinized by scientists, more so than any other single technique. As a matter of fact till date more than 600 studies have been researched in over 200 countries around the world. Over 30 research institutions in 30 countries have published a total of over 100 research articles in scholarly journals. These studies have been by and large positive and shown TM to be appropriate for ameliorating the ills and negative condition of many parts of the world.

#### Box 23.2 TM and Science

TM is perhaps the only program to have received such a great deal of scientific attention. In an age where science rules supreme such validation can be most crucial for the spread, popularity and authenticity of a programme. Has this validation been not forthcoming or had the results been negative then the TM programme would have been invalidated. However, the results were in fact so positive that TM got a thorough boost and those interested in it included scientists, doctors and laymen.

Let us now talk about a related finding in TM, which is that of the Maharishi effect. This effect proposes that if just one percent of a society does TM it creates a profoundly positive impact on the community. Further, the Extended Maharishi Effect the same solidarity is produced by "the Square root of one percent of the population" which are doing and practicing the TM Sidhi Yogic Flying programme. This programme has come in for adverse comments especially the claim to levitation and yogic flying.

In this section we finally turn to the efforts of Maharishi in the fields of Vedic science. That is to say that apart from TM specifically the Maharishi has revived the ancient knowledge of the Vedic tradition much of which is or was lying dormant. The Vedas scripted some 5000 years ago from an oral tradition were written down in Sanskrit and dealt with all the aspects of man's life on earth and the beyond. As the TM literature points out Veda means the complete knowledge of Natural Law. We may then say the Maharishi Vedic Science is aimed at the "Science and technology of consciousness". These programs are thus "consciousness based" and have as their goal the awakening of the full potential of the consciousness of human beings. This would help in making the world a better place and help man avoid mistakes at a personal level (conflict, divorce, violence, inequalities) and also at a global level which is economic caploitation and war. The way Maharishi looks at Vedic Science is that it would help everyone on earth achieve their right to being a fully enlightened efficiently functioning human being. The full use of body mind and soul would result from an application of Maharishi Vedic Science.

Thus the practical Vedic technologies of Maharishi are designed to reduce or eliminate the problems that are faced in day to day life. There are several areas which were taken up on priority basis:

- i) Vedic health is a consciousness based area which involves the intelligence of the body and mind to create better health through various means including exercising with yoga and eating the right kind of diet. This area of endeavor is called Maharishi consciousness based health care.

- ii) Vedic Education, in this Maharishi Consciousness Based Education is used to getting a holistic education in which there is awareness of a high order and that of a good order of morality. It teaches to share and care for others and to give back to the earth/environment more than you take from it.

These and other such programmes like that on Vedic agriculture (organically grown food); Vedic astrology which provides future trends in life through jyotish and finally Vedic music from the Maharishi Gandharva Veda music. In this way Maharishi has spanned a vast spectrum of vital concern.

Till now we have been discussing about and prescribing TM as a meditational technique or method. However, it is time that we introduce into our discourse some of the spiritual ideas of TM since we are now in danger of presenting TM simply as a kind of spiritual exercise that helps in controlling stress and tension and thereby leading to better efficiency in life and work. However, TM is more than an exercise of 20 minutes meditation in the morning and evening. To get an idea about the spiritual ideology of TM we turn to an explication of the same in an interview that Maharishi gave Rachel Kelley of UCLA. In this exchange of questions and answers Kelley talks of various aspects of social process including the role of students and the question of enlightenment.

## 23.6 Maharishi on Enlightenment

At the outset of the interview Maharishi tells Kelley that TM is a phenomena that has been around for many years and therefore Kelley should ask some new questions so that new areas could be explored. It was in this context that Kelley broached the topic of "enlightenment" which is an experience and a concept which is in fact at the centre of spirituality and is mentioned in scriptural traditions most especially the Vedic Tradition. On being questioned about what enlightenment is the Maharishi points out succinctly that is it being in accordance with the natural law. Enlightenment the Maharishi points out means "absence of darkness". This in itself implies a perfect life in which everything falls into place and there is no conflict and mistake. It is pointed out that such a state implies that there is "no weakness" or any kind of shortfall in life. In everything an enlightened man does there is success and the fulfillment of all desire. That is to say we are living in accord with the natural law. Everything is therefore easy and gets completed without undue duress on the person. It was in this sense that Buddha was Enlightened. It is also the sense in which the Maharishi is an Enlightened man. In accordance with his own definition of enlightenment the Maharishi his story is a story about enlightenment and what it means. Maharishi has certainly clear touch with the Natural Law and has therefore been able to accomplish so much that it is difficult to imagine that one man could be behind the vast TM empire that teaches enlightenment and promises a total life. The Maharishi points out that the enlightened man is not in the 'dark' about anything. In other words TM is not simply or only about stress busting techniques but a spiritual path which shows ready results and which have been verified by research.

At this juncture in the UCLA interview the questioner asks about TM. It is asked whether anyone is capable of assimilating and using TM and what are the basic prerequisites for this endeavor.

### Action and Reflection 23.1

Meet some practitioners of TM and ask them to relate how they have benefited. Note down your findings in your notebook.

Maharishi is very candid in his reply. He says TM simply requires that the student has a desire to learn it through a teacher. This is a very important statement and very revolutionary because in the Vedic tradition the qualification of a disciple and the requirements of discipline, commitment, authority and so on are very great. Maharishi by opening up Vedic knowledge, and making it benefit of the stringent requirements of studentship under a master has opened up this treasure house to all those who simply have a desire to learn from a teacher. At this point a few words about faith in the teacher need to be discussed. In the Vedic system we find that the guru is the ultimate authority. The Vedic system is about the faith in the authority and words of the guru. In the case of TM Maharishi has not put on the trappings of the guru so far as ideology is concerned. TM can be learned practiced and benefited from even if there is little faith in the guru. However, unless there is respect for the teacher there will be hardly any inspiration to go on with the technique. It is here that Mahesh yogi has made such a difference in the field of spirituality. He has very clearly substituted faith in the guru with proof of the working of the technique. When there is scientific evidence about the TM benefits and effects which student will not have faith in the master who is propagating and teaching this meditation method? Thus, in the system of Maharishi Vedic Science it is laboratory proof that matters and things do not have to be taken on trust or belief. This has been a modernization of Indian tradition in a basic way.

Maharishi points out that meditation is taught by the teacher and learned by the disciple. He notes that all the 5 million or so people who do TM, and those who have been meditating for the last 40-50 years are all on the path of enlightenment. Not only these meditators are actually 'gaining enlightenment'. This of course implies again that they are coming in accord with natural Law and ceasing to be confused, miserable and depressed. They are reaching the stage when there are "no mistakes in life" and also become non-violent and peaceful. This is the path of TM. It is therefore a cult which has kept the ideology of the movement in the background while the practice of meditation has been put to the fore. Usually, it is the ideology of cult which is eulogized and used as a point of reference to attract students, but in the case of TM the ideology comes through only after you are already on the path. It becomes gradually clear to the meditation that far from simply overcoming stress he or she is on a endless path and is becoming ever more attuned to the flow of Nature's way and is in fact embarked upon a spiritual adventure.

At this point in time Kelley asks Maharishi what is the value of students meditating according to the TM way? The Maharishi is very clear about his answer and points out that the student life is to gain knowledge, if possible to gain total knowledge. Then if the TM method is used the students are striving towards total knowledge. Now, this needs a little explanation in that the TM method though based around a mantra is basically a sit down type of meditation and the meditator observes the working of the mind through the various thoughts, ideas, problems that go through his or her consciousness. Thus apart from the destressing effect of the meditation there is also unleashed a tremendous amount of information about the thinking and desiring process. Facts that were buried in the unconscious come up and demand attention. As such the meditator is geared to solving the problems on the one hand and destressing gives him the time to formulate a strategy. Very often this could be precisely how to improve the performance in meditation. Then, alone is total knowledge possible. It cannot be that a person sits down, does a mantra, and becomes enlightened. Meditation the TM way therefore is much more than meets the eye and its secrets have to be unraveled.

Maharishi then goes on to clarify in this interview that the consciousness of the transcendental is "the unified field of all the laws of nature". He compares this to the findings of the unified field theory of physics which tries to put all scientific knowledge under one umbrella. This is at the basis of all intelligence and to get to the natural law means getting into the field of Total Intelligence, in which all and everything is known. This is another name for Enlightenment. In this state Maharishi reiterates that all goes well and all goes according to plan. In the student life the aim is to develop knowledge to the greatest possible degree and to thereby set the foundation for the rest of the life. This is the time not simply for activities of rote or memorizing but creativity, so far as student meditators are concerned. This is really very important because Intelligence implies creativity. Thus, TM is believed to be a fountain head of creativity, so far as student meditators are concerned. Without a clear headed appreciation of life as it faces a student it would not be possible to face and to understand complex life-situations. Nothing can be approached mechanically in life as life-situations keep on changing and only through meditation can they be controlled. Further we must realize as Maharishi points out that spiritually is an "unfolding". It doesn't happen all at once or suddenly. It happens bit by bit and accumulates slowly but surely. Thus when Maharishi says that students should gain total knowledge we take it that this applies to all students of TM and not to those who are at the university alone. So, the goal of TM meditators is total knowledge, Intelligence, and to get in flow with the laws of nature. However, Maharishi has also pointed out in this interview that TM students and University TM students can together "recreate" the whole social structure of society and make it a better place. This is a highly idealistic stand. unlikely Till now 5-6 million TM meditators exist but the population of the world is about 5 billions of individuals. Here, of course the idea of a percentage of meditators calming down the world does help us to view facts in better perspective. However it cannot be denied if everyone began to do TM the problems of the world would certainly ameliorate.

Kelley now asks whether the "ease" with which one reaches the Natural Law is not exaggerated? How can something which is very natural and easy also be effective? It is asked by Kelley to the Maharishi that how does this contradiction get resolved?

## 23.7 TM and Natural Law

The Maharishi explains that TM creates a condition of great relaxation in the mind. TM makes the mind spontaneously quiet and the silence that comes from meditation persists in active life. TM is thus a reservoir for energy to be drawn out from the "bank" of consciousness. In the manner a man withdraws money from bank and then has no worries of expense similarly in TM the energy fields within the body are lighted up and there is an abundance of energy after a session of TM. Since, TM attunes to the field of Total knowledge, Intelligence and Natural Law the TM technique is one which combines ease with effectiveness. These is no struggle, no nightmares, no disappointments only greater energy to be used for the greater good and for the betterment of life for everyone around us. Maharishi insists that TM is effortless and does not involve hard labour or demand impossible concentration etc. According to Maharishi it is very important to economise on the effort. He believes in: do less and accomplish more. Obviously, what is being implied is an intelligent application of energy by the disciple rather than mechanical effort. According to Maharishi success is not an achievement which has resulted from desperate efforts, titanic struggle and at the cost of one's health. Success is instead achieved by aligning oneself with the ease and flow of

the Natural Law. Maharishi also suggests that it is in the consciousness that the desires get fulfilled and that these should be examined closely. All pros and cons seen clearly in meditation and basing oneself upon Natural Law the TM meditator would live a moral purposeful life. Thus as the meditates twice daily he comes closer and closer in time with the Natural Law and this makes everything easy to accomplish.

Kelley then asks the Maharishi about those who would be meditators who are afraid to go into a deep rest state? Kelley points out such deep rest states are not known to the would be students and they can find them frightening. Maharishi clarifies this doubt by pointing out that these fears are unfounded and that TM creates relaxation as natural as sleep. He points out that TM is not at all forced and is a natural and creative process. He also points out to Kelley's question that if there were a large number of TM students at UCLA they would create great scientists and geniuses who could alter the face of the earth with their inventions and discoveries. He cites Keith Wallace as one such pioneer who gave the world the first research into TM and published his most positive findings.

Further Maharishi has indicated by his demeanour that life that that life is to be enjoyed and should be a lot of fun. Maharishi is sometimes known as the "giggling guru" because he laughs and enjoys what he is doing very much.

The whole gist of the teachings of Maharishi centre down to the consideration of what he terms a "lack of proper education". This is what the Maharishi holds responsible for the ills of the world, and surely according to this approach a lack of knowledge of TM would constitute a kind of lack of understanding, sharing and caring for the world. The Maharishi reiterates that the central feature of any society or civilization depends on education. So, we might as well ask what does the Maharishi mean by education itself? The Maharishi is referring here obviously to the awakening of intelligence in the life of the disciples, devotees, students and others so that they can function according to Natural Law. Maharishi points out very pertinently that it is the intelligence in the physiology that makes it move or drives it ahead. Without that intelligence education would be incomplete. The emphasis then must focus on the awakening of intelligence and this is one thing which TM also attempts to do through its meditation techniques of sitting 20 minutes twice a day, morning and evening.

### Box 23.3 Aspects of Learning

Maharishi points out that education is oriented all over the world towards the physical when actually it should be geared towards the force that drives the physical that is the world of consciousness. This would be a revolutionary step as it would instill in the students a new set of morals and values. Maharishi gives a graphic example when he points out that although it is the hand that commits the act of violence, it is the mind which is ultimately responsible. It is clear it is education which should culture the life and the mind. Culture of the mind is that in which a higher intelligence operates and not a lower one. It is this higher intelligence in life operations and activities which TM seeks to activate. Once the intelligence is awakened through TM practices then the student has come in accordance to the natural law and life will become a wonderful journey. However, if the education is unable to see the fact of the necessity of creating a centre of higher intelligence in the physiology then education will not be education for humanitarian purposes of peace and goodwill.

answer is the necessity of Vedas, knowledge that is practical and total and covers every aspect of life in the world. It is a knowledge that was perfected and put into script about 5000 years ago in the Sanskrit script. We do not stop simply at literary or mathematical exercises but include Vedic Health or Ayurveda which has itself developed a complex theory of humours and phlegms in the body and requires a skilled practitioners to administer the various medicines. Thus again it is intelligence that is guiding the doctor from a higher source which helps in the diagnosis of cure or containment. Ayurveda in its practice takes great care of dietary provisions and even uses precious metals and stones in the preparation of its *bhasms* or medicine compounds. It has no known side effects and derives directly from the vedas. The medicine available today is very advanced relatively but it has many side effects. Similarly, Maharishi points out that what is needed further is Vedic (organic) agriculture and what he calls Vedic Defence. Vedic defence is a very interesting idea in that it means to "prevent the birth of an enemy". This is itself a pacifist philosophy in which the idea is a lifestyle that does not breed enmity and hatred. It is also realistic in recognizing the need to defend oneself and this means an intelligent way of living. One of the most important requirements for intelligence to flourish is a clear mind and sufficient reserves of energy. With a clear mind and sufficient reserves of energy it is possible to live intelligently peacefully and with balanced desires. Thus the attitude of Vedic Defence is not simply be strong enough to push back the enemy but to live life in such a way as to have no enemies. When we ask how this is to be accomplished the answer is TM. In attempting this Vedic method of approaching education, health, defence and so on Maharishi assures a happy and peaceful life.

#### Action and Reflection 23.2

Reflect upon and discuss the "Natural Law of Living with TM practitioners. Note down your findings in your notebook.

In relation to Vedic defence how does it stand in relation to the war crime and violence all over the world. The endeavour of each generation has been to wipe out the crime and war but it has not been able to succeed. In fact, there have been two world wars and endless regional and local conflicts as well as international conflagrations. One explanation that has been given for war and violence is high testosterone levels in the males which make them aggressive and violent and therefore they indulge in the territorial imperative of war and violence. While this explanation is fine what is missing from this theory is how to end this aggressive sneak in man and make him peaceful and peace-loving. The method that Maharishi would like to use to tame all the aggression and violence is to do group practice of TM and TM-Sidhi program produced in a group of about 200 people will create peaceful vibrations that eradicate crime and create peace. Maharishi is doing this through the Peace Palace initiatives where 200 TM-Sidhi Experts will live and meditate together for world peace.

### 23.8 Maharishi's Writings on TM

Let us now look at some of the books which the Maharishi has published since his has been a multimedia approach to the popularization of TM. These books deal with different areas of endeavour and outline the various dynamics of the problem. As always the solution that lurks at the back of the discourse is TM or TM-Sidhi programs.

The first book that Maharishi published in 1963 was called "Science of Being and Art of Living— Transcendental Meditation". This book explained in detail all about TM and the Art of Living. No, doubt the concept of

spontaneous living and coming in accordance with the Natural Law are very important concepts here. It was a path breaking book that reached many millions of people and not only pointed out the desired paradise but also how to get to it through the simple technique of TM. It was a book with a vision for a "new humanity".

Mahesh Yogi then gave his insights into the Bhagavad Gita. Maharishi's commentary is profuse and incisive and he praises the Gita as the book in which all practical wisdom is enshrined. The Gita is a book which has inspired the Bhakti Saints and the Sufis alike. Where does that leave us? What has the Gita got to do with TM? At first glance not much perhaps but on deep consideration the Gita is very definitely the very source of the TM technique as it is taught in the Gita itself. That is to say there is a mantra (Om) and there is a guru (Krishna). Krishna asks Arjun in the Gita to sit down in a comfortable place, free from vermin, and then to focus between the eyebrows, eyes closed and then to inhale and exhale keeping the mantra flowing in and out of the nostrils in proper rhythm. In the case of TM the mantras given are many and individual but the practice of meditation is very similar as prescribed in the Gita. However, this is the Vedic Science and sources and similarities are not being hidden. In fact its consonance with Gita meditation gives TM even more authenticity.

#### Box 23.4 Maharishi and Vedic Education

Maharishi feels a study of his first book would be most valuable. As is known Vedic Education divided life into various stages in which the early age was to be devoted to celibacy and studentship. However, these steps are not easy to follow for everybody and Maharishi once again points out that the kind of meditation he is advocating (TM) fulfills the Vedic dream of students living peacefully and improving the world. The educators would have to be TM trained and these are the people who will impart education about being happy in the here and now through meditation and the alignment that it brings to natural law and the creativity that follows. The goal of students should be total knowledge. As noted the Maharishi feels the students and teachers of premier institutions of learning can change the face of the world and can be at the vanguard of a new world.

Some of the other books that Maharishi has penned include

- a) Maharishi speaks to students
- b) Celebrating perfection in Education
- c) Maharishis Absolute Theory of Government - Automation in Administration
- d) Maharishi Forum for Natural Law and National Law for Doctors
- e) Ideal India
- f) Constitution of India Fulfilled through Maharishis Transcendental Meditation

As can be seen from a sampling of what Maharishi has written his concern clearly is to bring the higher or transcendental consciousness into every heart and into every aspect of every nation. His agenda is to change the world for the better and for this he has theorized and practiced unified consciousness of the Natural Law in the fields of religion, education, Defence, Administration, Natural Law and even the Constitution of India. Maharishis has been a fruitful and useful publishing career.

All these books can be rightly seen as part of Maharishis peace initiatives for the world. Maharishi is a person centred teacher who believes that

each human being should have the 'deep rest' of the TM experience to guide and recharge him. Having transformed himself then the individual becomes himself a centre of peace, love, bliss and contentment. To bring peace to humanity Maharishi has taken many initiatives. In 1957 he stated that if one percent of the world's people practiced TM there would be an end to war. In 1963 during the Cuban Missile Crisis Maharishi counselled meditators to extend their period of meditation as this would avert the crisis. In 1974 the 'one percent theory' of crime reduction got scientific proof of crime reduction in such cities and areas. From 1978 to 1984 Maharishi sent thousands of "Yogic Flyers" to trouble spots around the world.

## 23.9 Benefits of TM

We have dealt with various different aspects of TM so far including its history, philosophy, and methodologies. In this concluding section we talk of the all around benefits of TM as recorded by scientists and social scientists. The TM literature points out that TM is the key to:

- clearer thinking
- better health
- fulfilling relationship
- a peaceful world

Thus in terms of clearer thinking we find that the TM practitioner begins to find it relatively easy to solve problems and to feel fresh and alert most of the time. There is a feeling of hope and transcendence. This is often noticed by people around the TM practitioner who is relatively "destressed" and more relaxed, since he has been doing his or her meditation. These benefits are practical and real and have been verified by around 600 scientific studies at different centres all over the world numbering some 200 independent research institutions spread over 35 countries. Such research indicates that the benefits of TM to body mind and brain are measurable and have a scientific basis to them. It is one thing to claim benefits but another when there is scientific finding and proofs.

These benefits are now being experienced all around the world for the last five decades. In fact, it is often pointed out that the TM is an ancient Vedic technique which is modified for contemporary usage. This was done by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to make the technique suitable and effective for the modern age.

Thus the saying that we need proof to believe is amply borne out by people enjoying benefits in various fields. The mind-benefits, or benefits to the mind include various factors including a more efficient memory bank; clearer and logical way of thinking. There is also a capacity for clearer creativity and the ability to concentrate and focus on a problem is greatly enhanced. The brain potential is also realized greatly. The effect on the intellect is to make it much sharper. The IQ becomes higher and there is generally a greater degree of awareness and consciousness in perception and apprehension of life-situations.

As regards the benefits to the body are concerned they are very many and include the reduction of stress. There is also a greater degree of energy feelings in the organism. Here is better health which means medical expenses are reduced. The body also feels younger and energetic. The body also experiences better and deeper and restful sleep. The TM practitioner's blood pressure is lower and if it is high it will come down.

There is also a tendency for the meditator to reduce his alcohol usage and this is also beneficial in itself. Meditators also develop the ability and the will power to stop smoking. There is also a great reduction in the tension of the body and there is also a recorded relief from asthma. The practice of TM also reduces and lowers cholesterol which is an agent which excess of is bad for health and heart function. Further, the body being alert the person is able to react aptly to a situation quickly and efficiently. That is the reaction time for response to a challenge is much less and much more efficient. Practicing TM prolongs life apart from making it healthier. Thus, the benefits for mind and body are extensive and are like a cleansing of the chakras in conventional yoga so that primordial energy flows can go on in the body unimpeded by energy blocks.

There are benefits for relationship through the practice of TM. Thus friendship becomes fulfilling. The person develops a feeling of inner calmness and peace and tranquility. There is also a greater feeling of self confidence and the ability and capacity to tackle relationships.

## 23.10 Conclusion

Through TM the capacity to see as a 'whole' also develops by first making the perspective on the world bigger, and then holistic. The meditator also develops a great deal of tolerance and patience which are essential in relationships. Further there is a capacity to appreciate others which develops with the practice of TM. Behaviour of the meditator becomes in tune with the other people and they exhibit harmonious living within the environment. All this also has the effect of making the meditators life more enjoyable and happy. Anxiety levels experience a drop and there is a tremendous reduction in abreaktions such as anger. Further even depression is reduced and finally eliminated by meditating the TM way. As such there is an explosive input all around the social sphere of the TM practitioner.

There are also practical benefits for professional life of the meditators. Initially the professional develops a stronger and positive self image and his concept of himself becomes clear. Further the meditator develops the knack of making the right decisions and make them with less reaction time and deliberation. The meditator is able to do his job in a more efficient and productive manner. He is also able to quickly solve problems and to enjoy the work and have greater job satisfaction. Another benefit is that the practitioners create effective leadership with democratic norms. The meditators are able to accomplish great tasks with relatively less effort.

Thus we may say TM is beneficial for the world at large and creates through the mind waves that make the city life better by reducing crime, and reducing the levels of traffic accidents and injuries. The rate of homicide goes down, terrorism declines and international conflict is contained and what ensues is a peaceful world. Thus the potential of TM is revolutionary and it is being further realized in the postmodern world on a daily basis.

## Further Reading

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## Unit 24

# Hare Krishna Movement

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### Content

- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Aims of the Movement
- 24.3 Structure of ISKCON
- 24.4 History of ISKCON
- 24.5 Modern Yoga: Yaga as Chanting
- 24.6 Srila on Lord Krishna
- 24.7 Devotion and Surrender
- 24.8 The Eight Mystical Perfections
- 24.9 Types of Devotion and Devotees
- 24.10 Conclusion
- 24.11 Further Reading

### Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- give the aims of ISKCON;
- provide the History of ISKCON;
- explain modern yoga and chanting;
- the place of Sri Krishna in ISKCON;
- talk about the eight mystical perfections; and
- describe types of devotion and devotee.

### 24.1 Introduction

Hare Rama, Hare Krishna is a highly visible cult since their members sport a shaven head with a top knot, wear saffron dhottis and take out ecstatic progressions in the streets sometimes even the main traffic thoroughfares. Here they beat the tablas and tamboras and chant the 'Hare Krishna' mantra while dancing, singing, and twirling around. This may give the layman an impression that nothing serious is involved. Nothing could be further from the Truth. The Hare Krishna's as ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) is popularly known is a very traditional movement but has been given added colour and spread in the west and east. The Hare Krishna's are strict about their vegetarianism and do not consume alcohol and have high moral standards. They have to live a celibate life with many hours of devotional service to Lord Krishna who is to them the Source of Devotion. The Hare Krishna trust Lord Krishna as God and worship him as such.

Hare Krishna or ISKCON is based on a long lineage of masters who have handed over the succession from master to disciple for a long time. Theirs is thus a *parampara* a tradition of teachers. There are in it four "disciple successions" which are known as *sampradaya*. The Hare Krishna's

belong to the Brahma Sampradaya which it is believed was formed by Lord Krishna himself. In this sampradaya there are many branches and fragments and ISKCON society belongs to the branch set up and founded by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## 24.2 Aims of the Movement

The idea is that all the Vaishava teachings should be passed intact to the main disciple or the new teacher who in turn has the responsibility to teach, develop and transmit the Vaishnava teachings to future generations. A prominent devotee becomes known as an *acharya* who are the main teachers of the sect both actually and theoretically. Some of the main acharyas include:

- 1) Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu
- 2) The Six Goswamis of Vrindaban
- 3) Bhakti Siddharta Sarasvati Thakura
- 4) A.C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada

ISKCON stands for the "International Society for Krishna Consciousness", and this was founded in 1966 by Swami Srila Prabhupada. Since 1966 ISKCON has become a world wide society which has 10,000 temples, devotees and a number of 2,50,000 "congregational" devotees. ISKCON is more popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement. ISKCON runs 350 centres, 60 rural communities, 50 schools and 60 restaurants all over the world. It is clear that the scale of the movement is very great as to run all these centres and temples is no mean feat especially since Srila Prabhupada is no more. The main mission of ISKCON which describes itself as a nonsectarian, monotheistic movement is to comprise the well being of society by teaching Krishna consciousness according to the Bhagavad Gita and ancient scriptures. There are in fact seven aims of the movement to which we now turn. The seven aims of ISKCON are:

- 1) firstly to propagate spirituality and spiritual knowledge to society as such. It is to educate people spiritually so that the breakdown in values is balanced out and world peace and unity is achieved once and for all.
- 2) the second part of the goal is to propagate and create Krishna consciousness as this is revealed and indicated in the Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagvatam. We should note that Bhagavad Gita is the basic text which ISKCON subscribes to and teaches from as it is directly related to Sri Krishna.
- 3) thirdly the aim is to create a solidarity among societal members built around the worship of Krishna. Building up the awareness that each member of society is part of Krishna the Godhead and therefore brothers and sisters who should live in peace together in the worship of Krishna.
- 4) the fourth aim of ISKCON is to encourage and teach about the Sankirtana movement which is a group chanting of the name of Krishna. These follow the teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu the teacher of the lineage after Sri Krishna.
- 5) ISKCON also aims to instruct a building which is very large where Krishna lila can be enacted.
- 6) ISKCON teaches a simple and natural life.
- 7) finally to achieve these aims the ISKCON aims to and has published books, magazines, pamphlets etc.

ISKCON believes in the Vaisnava philosophy. It is pointed out that inquiry into the nature of absolute truth is the start of the spiritual life. So far as ISKCON or Hare Ramas are concerned the Supreme Godhead is Krishna. However, it is also recognized that Godhead has different names including the names such as Vishnu, Rama, Jehovah, Buddha, Allah and so on. The main aim of this Gaudhya Vaishavism is to develop love for Godhead the Supreme.

To understand oneself according to this philosophy is to make oneself fit for being spiritual minded. To be spiritual minded self understanding is very important. Without an understanding of the self it is not possible to travel inwards towards the Godhead. However as the tradition points out for this to happen much effort has to be made under the tutelage of the spiritual master who has perfected the art of spiritual knowledge. This, it is pointed out as being a procedure similar to learning anything at all - a master is a must without whom there is no spiritual growth. The group chanting of maha mantra "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Hare Hare" was popularized by Sri Chaitanya. This mantra is believed to be best for self purification in Kali Yug age. Before we go on we must say a word about the structure of the ISKCON organization. First of all there are the communities who practice the Krishna consciousness in the privacy and security of their homes. The work and life however, in a community are with group chanting, family, gardening and so on.

### 24.3 Structure of ISKCON

On the other hand those members who are attached to temples are undergoing training to function as people who would conduct worship and propagate the faith. That is to say they are clergy and would be involved in ministerial work for ISKCON. There are some people have who work to coordinate the ISKCON rural communities programmes. Now, in 1970 Swami Prabhupada convened a General Body Commission (GBC) to help manage the expansion of ISKCON. Before leaving his body in 1977 Srila Prabhupada has already requested that after his death the governing and decision making powers be handed over to this GBC. Thus, it is the GBC which is responsible for ISKCON's plans, strategies on how they are to fulfill the seven point charter of goals mentioned earlier. The methods for arriving at a consensus do involve the right to vote democratically and consultations with the important people in the Temples and so on.

Another part of the ISKCON structure is what is called the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT). Srila Prabhupada was a tireless writer and in about 12 years he produced 70 volumes of works. These were mostly translations of Sanskrit treatises and copious commentaries on them. This trust was established in 1972 and is today among the world's largest publishers and distributors books on Indian Philosophy and religion. Till the present the BBT has published over 500 million books and magazines in over 60 languages. This gives us an idea of the scale of ISKCON's operations. The structure is simple yet effective. The power of Srila Prabhupada thus now vests in the GBC and the responsibility for missionary work rests with the clergy which are under training. All important decisions are proposed in the GBC. Where there is any contentious issue democratic voting is necessary and is taken recourse to. We must not undermine however, the role of the community groups in rural areas. These are in many ways the backbone of the entire movement because the chants and Krishna consciousness is very effective in a quiet atmosphere in a rural setting. As such the rural communities become the invisible hand of the movement while urban communities are more visible in the ISKCON.

## 24.4 History of ISKCON

Hare Krishna Movement

Before we proceed further it is important to know something of the history of ISKCON. The international society of Krishna consciousness was promulgated by Srila Prabhupada in 1966. The philosophy of this movement is that of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. This is basically a tradition of devotion or Bhakti based on the wisdom of Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagvatam. As regards the theoretical and ideological constructs of ISKCON these were presented and codified by the 15<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and saint Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu along with the six goswamis of Vrindaban.

The devotees regard Sri Chaitanya as a full and total reincarnation of Lord Sri Krishna. Sri Chaitanya built up the Bhakti movement greatly and the Bhakti movement flourished all over India. He was a great compiler of sacred literature and under his personal guidance many hundreds of sacred books and literature were compiled. These were connected with the philosophy of Krishna. The line of Sri Chaitanya and the six swamis of Vrindaban stretches down to Srila. The 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian Bhaktivinoda brought Krishna consciousness in the modern world. His son Bhaktisiddharta Sarasvati Goswami became the guru of Srila and entrusted him with spreading Krishna consciousness.

ISKCON's is basically an Indian philosophical orientation and in order to indicate this the specifically directed ideas involved in it are distinctly Hindu. We then take as our point of departure some frequently asked questions and their answers according to the ISKCON's view point. This will help us build up a base for further explorations into what ISKCON stands for and how it has interpreted the Bhakti element of Hinduism which is associated with it.

The questions to which Hare Krishna gives the answer include,

- 1) Why do negative things happen to good people?
- 2) What is karma?
- 3) Can bad karma be reduced through meditation?
- 4) How can I do my duties if everything is predestined?
- 5) Is everything already determined by God?
- 6) Is everything predetermined?
- 7) Why does not God control our senses?
- 8) Will Bhakti take us back to Godhead?
- 9) If God is merciful why did he create evil?
- 10) If we go to heaven will we ever return?
- 11) Do we have control over our desires and thoughts?
- 12) How can we have faith in God?
- 13) What is the position of ISKCON with the respect to Jesus Christ?
- 14) Is animal sacrifice valid?
- 15) If we do not follow Krishna consciousness is our life a waste?
- 16) How to recognize a spiritually realized master?
- 17) How can we identify a person who has seen the Truth?

- 18) Can all self realized persons be a master?
- 19) Are only acharyas representations of God?
- 20) When and how does a devotee feel the necessity of a living spiritual master?
- 21) Is the relationship between disciple and guru eternal?
- 22) Does true love exist in this world?

Such and many similar questions are frequently asked questions. The document does not record the answers but it is obvious that a study of the tenets of the yoga of Krishna consciousness will allow us to answer these questions for ourselves as students. Towards the fulfillment of this and we will provide the exposition of ISKCON on the philosophy and sociology of living in this world. A study of that will answer all these and similar questions.

## 24.5 Modern Yoga: Yoga as Chanting

In the Gita Sri Krishna outlines a method of yoga which is called ashtanga yoga as it has several parts to it. It has eight parts to it and one must sit in a certain posture, observe dietary restrictions, control the inflow and outflow of the breath. The yogi must concentrate on the heart chakra after completely stilling down the mind. One must concentrate on Vishnu as sitting in the heart. Astanga yoga system demands very many preconditions and one has to develop first of all a sense control apart from many other regulations and then as mentioned there is breath control and thought control. Then, only is it possible to visualize Vishnu as seated in the heart. When Arjun heard Sri Krishna expound this form of yoga he was taken aback and was quite frankly skeptical about his ability to follow the eightfold path of ashtanga yoga and told Sri Krishna that the yoga he was expounding was impossible to perform. Not only were the restrictions and rules difficult the very practice of asana or posture takes years to perfect. Without a perfected asana it is difficult to practice all the exercises for control of senses and breath so that concentration and meditation can be attained.

### Box 24.1 Ashtanga Yoga

Srila Prabhupada points out that in reality the eightfold path of ashtanga yoga is not impractical. Srila Prabhupada points out that were the astanga system of yoga really impractical then Sri Krishna would not have described and propagated the same. Thus, according to Srila ashtanga yoga appears to be impractical although it is not really so. It is pointed out by Srila that what is easy and practical for one person/man could very well be an impossibility for someone else. It is all a matter of relativity. In this particular discourse in the Gita as elsewhere Arjun is the common man with his share of problems and responsibilities. He cannot afford to cut himself off from society and sit down and meditate in isolation in a cave or the jungle.

Arjun as Srila points out is not a scholar or a mendicant. He is fighting in the Mahabharata battle and is doing his duty as a warrior and has many problems on a day to day basis and that's why the eightfold system of astanga yoga is not practical for him.

Astanga yoga is impractical for the common or the ordinary man. However, it is or can be practical for the renunciant who has left his responsibilities of family and the household behind and can meditate uninterruptedly. Thus, Srila asks the question that although the system of astanga yoga is

relevant who can practice it in the present age? Though Arjuna was a warrior and from a royal lineage he couldn't conceive of doing the astanga system of meditation. How much less so the common man? Srila is quite categorical in this judgement and points out that if the system is attempted only failure can result. This is the reason why Arjun finds himself unable to accept the astanga yoga. It is clear that the ordinary man cannot go out into the jungles or caves and sit practicing this yoga in the Age of Kaliyuga. The Kaliyuga has created cut throat competition in every field of endeavour and seeks to throttle the spiritual in man. In every field there is contention and conflict. In the age of Kali to even sit down legs folded is a difficult feat let alone the various requirements of an astanga yogi. As Srila says "The present age is characterized by a bitter struggle for a short duration of life in which the bliss of the Lord is never realized." Srila points out as Kaliyuga will progress the span of life will get even shorter and man's struggle to survive will get even more intense and humiliating. The good qualities of heart and mind will also get scarce and compassion be a mere word in the dictionary.

Srila points out that in the Kaliyuga most people are not serious about self realization even if the method is easy to let alone methods that are difficult. The method is difficult (astanga yoga) not only in terms of the activities it refers to but also because it demands many gymnastic feats which are not possible to accomplish for the common man. Thus Srila is concerned with the salvation of the ordinary man who is unable to latch on to anything which is out of the ordinary. How can the common man be approached by an uncommon method. It became obvious to Srila that the system of astanga yoga was not suitable to the common man. If Arjuna a most extraordinary warrior found that he could not cope with the various requirements of detachment and length of duration for realization then obviously it is a system meant for very few people who had the most extraordinary abilities. Srila points out that the time span of human life is reducing from the Sat yuga to the Dwapar yuga to Treta yuga and so on as such the sixty or seventy years assigned to man in the Kali yuga is not sufficient to struggle with astanga yoga for the goal of self-realization. Srila says humorously that even though Arjuna had a thousand years to live he felt astanga yoga as impossible to perform. Arjuna had better facilities but he refused to accept this yoga. In history Srila points out there is no record of Arjuna ever having used this yoga. As such this system is practically impossible in the present age of Kali. Some rare individual may arise and make use of this yoga but this is not generally the case. Srila points out if this was the case five thousand years ago what must be the condition now in this Age, in the present day. He feels that all attempts to popularize this system in the present day through various schools and societies are futile.

Now we have pointed out adequately that astanga yoga system is impractical, the bhakti yoga system is recommended for the present age. It does not require more than a genuine interest in spirituality and no special preconditions. Even those without education or training can join in the chants of the Kirtan. Thus, Srila points out that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has announced that only bhakti yoga is practical in Kaliyuga. The means of deliverance in Kali yuga is chanting the name of Hari. Srila points out that the effect of chanting is felt immediately as the person begins the chants. Any other yoga method does not produce such good results. In other systems it is difficult to know whether one is progressing or not but in chanting we can tell we are making progress. It is a yoga system through the means of which a person can find liberation with relative ease in this very life itself. The restless mind always flits from one fancy to another and is extremely restless. The chant of the Hare

Krishna quietens down the mind and makes it steady for devotion. The chant automatically fixes the mind on Hari and the yoga system attains its goal quickly. This is very beneficial since the name of Krishna and chanting it quickly leads to Krishna consciousness. What is important to note is that this Krishna consciousness requires constant chanting and practice in chanting. As has been said "one has to concentrate the mind steadily and constantly on the form of Vishnu". Thus, it is a question of 'chant and be happy'. In the words of George Harrison the la Beatle who was a member of ISKCON we can quote:

Everybody is looking for Krishna

Some don't realize

That they are, but they are

KRISHNA is GOD

The source of all that exists

The cause of all that is

Or ever will be

As God is unlimited

HE has many names

Allah- Buddha - Jehovah - Rama:

All are KRISHNA, all are ONE

Be serving GOD through

Each thought word and DEED

And by chanting this Holy Names

The devotee quickly develops God-consciousness

By chanting

*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna*

*Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare*

*Hare Rama, Hare Rama*

*Rama Rama, Hare Hare*

One inevitably arrives as KRISHNA Consciousness (The point of the pudding is in He eating!)

With this we end this section on the necessity and efficacy of chanting for liberation in Kali yuga.

## 24.6 Srila on Lord Krishna

ISKCON is visible for its public devotional chants and shaven headed dhoti clad dances. However, there is a serious social ideology and philosophy behind the actions of the devotees. They are celebrating Krishna the Supreme Godhead, in song and dance. Let us see what Swami Prabhupada has to say about Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna he says is the Supreme Absolute Truth. Srila points out that in his exposition of the Sankya Philosophy Kapila the atheist could not find god in the elements of nature. He examined each one and found that God was not in them. When Kapila could not uncover the unmanifested soul in the basic elemental structure he concluded

that god did not exist. However, in the Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna rules out this atheist philosophy and its position that the unmanifested soul is non-existent. He establishes that all material elements are well within his control. (Gita 7.4).

#### **Box 24.2 Devotion to Krishna**

Srila Asks who is Lord Krishna and what is his original form. He feels we should know all about Lord Krishna's glories so that an urge to worship him arises in us and we become his ardent devotees. For this a great deal of information and zeal is required as well as discussion of the great philosophical truths which strengthens the mind and makes it razor sharp. It is only when one is steeped in the knowledge of Sri Krishna that he or she can be devotional to Him. While Kapila retarded spiritual progress with his atheism and non-recognition of God Lord Sri Krishna revealed the Truth for all time to come. He pointed out to Arjun that he is the source of both the material and the spiritual. He pointed out to Arjun that he is the source of both the origin and the dissolution of both physical and the spiritual universe.

Srila feels that this has to be understood for the science of devotional service if this truth is understood a deep love for the Father and Mother of creation Sri Krishna arises. Now, Srila points out that Lord Krishna is the supreme male Godhead and therefore, there will automatically be His female counterpart to complement him.

The Supreme Person Lord Krishna is not subservient to Prakriti or Nature. Srila points out thinking about Nature is not enough we must ask "Who's Nature is it?" That is to say Nature has to belong, it cannot exist without someone or something to whose authority it is under. It cannot exist on its own. Srila notes that Prakriti is the same as sakti and sakti cannot exist in a purposeless state. Thus if we can latch on to the secret of nature we will be able to seek out our origins because sakti too must belong to its owner, the reason for the existence of sakti itself. Thus the search for the understanding of sakti is actually a search for the innermost self. Srila points out that Upanishads and similar Vedic scriptures state that Brahman is the Absolute Truth, and possessor of vast multifarious energies. Brahman is believed by Srila to the "effulgence" of Krishna's body. This means that for Srila Lord Krishna is beyond the Brahman and Brahman itself is part of Him. That is why he is regarded as the Supreme Godhead. Lord Krishna is defined as "indivisible, infinite, limitless, truth." The main energy that parades the universe is called Brahman and this covers anything and everything that is possible to conceive. Every conservable power, creativity or intelligence is in this state of pulsating powerful energy which is never reduced and never depleted. It is a state of completeness in which all creation plays a part but the Lord is supreme in his bliss in his security and warmth of Sakti's womb. Srila points out that the materialists are unable to conceive the wonder of the Lord. Similarly, those who are fond of spinning out theories regarding the origin of the universe are themselves confused greatly deluded. For these people to conceive of an All Powerful Godhead is incomprehensible and they are unable to register the power and the glory of the Lord. Both these types of people Srila points out are in a sad spiritual condition and it is Lord Krishna himself who has revealed the Truth about Himself in Bhagavad Gita. All being creatures are a product of the Lord Himself, they are a part of His spiritual energy and are superior to those creations which are material and cannot move think and so on. However, this does not mean that the living creatures are in any way on the same level as the one who has created them. We should not forget that while the creatures have been born due to the spiritual power of the Lord they are not equal to Him.

### Reflection and Action 24.1

Observe the worship at an ISKCON temple. Make note son the lalent points in your notebook.

According to Srila the Jiva principle is setting and keeping everything in motion. The jivas try to overpower nature and to use it in many ways giving way to a multifarious creation. The fact is if the jivas did not operate on the material world these world be no progress. It is only when energy vivifies and transforms material powers that they are able to yield dividends. As Srila puts it very succinctly "matter cannot organize itself".

It is clear then from the foregoing that there is some super Energy some super Sakti which is controlling and running the universe with its vast planetary systems all running together in relative harmony. How do seeds sprout or the geyser water come out of the earth? The mountains and valleys with their vegetation, flower and fruit are all such as to give a clear inkling that there is a Supreme Organizing Intelligence and this is Lord Krishna. He is the master of all Realities and the only Divine Reality in the world. However, it must be stressed that matter itself is inert and incapable of creation. It is dead and has nothing beyond a binding energy is it.

## 24.7 Devotion and Surrender

Sri Krishna Srila tells us is that the jivas are a superior energy which are the forces that exploit the mankind nature. The power of the jiva deriving from the Lord Krishna it does not have hardly anything in common with material nature, and energy. This is just, Srila points out, just as the marine creatures have little to do with land. Srila points out that the close affirmity between the material and the spiritual is in fact an illusion and imaginary. The jivas born of spiritual energy have a tendency to always try and control material energy. In fact this attempt to control and direct material energy led to the creation of the atomic bomb and its throwing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, to control nuclear energies negative effects is not wholly possible and this shows that when the jivas forget the Lord and begin to think of themselves as the Lord grievous actions result. This is the result of the ego of the material and is not connected with spirituality at all.

However, all energy can be used in the service of the Lord Krishna especially in the performance of sacrifice. In fact sacrifice itself is the basic premise of right karma where the results are not coveted but the worship is coveted. Srila points out that in the Vishnu Purana these are described 3 types of energies. These are

- 1) the spiritual potency
- 2) the living creatures and entities
- 3) ignorance

This spiritual potency we find all goodness and wisdom and truth and beauty and all that is good resides in it. It is the source of all that is wonderful and happy and in fact is the real nature of the saints and great souls. On the other hand the living entities and creatures are such that they are not able to discern the reality and in trying to do so they tend to become perplexed and confused. The energy of ignorance also reigns widely in the world of men which makes them do things which they would otherwise not do. The anomic elements in society which lead to conflict and the various local, regional and international levels are the result of

ignorance. We find that it is due to ignorance that the world is in turmoil and misery. Thus it is the chanting of the name of Krishna and the Hare Rama mantra which lead out of ignorance and towards light. Thus will mean that the confusion of the individual will recede and he will become a capable devotee who will work in the spiritual light of the Supreme and away from the dark forces of evil.

Everything in the world is an interaction between spirit and matter. It is an interaction between the Lords superior spiritual energy and the Lords inferior material energy. The material energy is known as the "field of activity", also called 'kshetra' and the energy of the spiritual is called "knower of the actually field" or the Kshetra-jhana. All life is a product of the interaction of the 'field' and the 'knower of the field'. That is, it is an interaction of the kshetra and kshetrajhana. Both these energies are controlled by the supreme Godhead Lord Krishna. He is to be recognized as the ultimate controller of all action and interaction. He is the ultimate cause of the creation, maintenance, and annihilation of the universe. This has been explained as Srila points out in the Gita itself. It is pointed out that all life has its source in inferior and superior energies. Yet the Lord is both the origin and the dissolution of all living things. Lord Krishna tells Arjun that he is the Greatest Truth beyond which there is nothing. The Lord points out that everything rests on him "as pearls and strung on a thread." Thus we must acknowledge the Lord for what He is: the master of our destiny and the ruler over life and death.

Srila points out that Sri Chaitanya was of the insight that the Lord and his energies are both one and different. According to Srila Prabhupada the deepest and most secret Truth is that Lord Krishna is the Supreme Absolute Truth. If we do not perceive this Truth then we will be classified as materialists who have blind sensual cravings. Lord Krishna explains this in the Gita when he points out that deluded by goodness, passion and ignorance the world lives in confusion and does not know the Lord who is beyond goodness, passions, and ignorance. He also points out that to go beyond delusion is very difficult. The only method in fact to do this is surrender to the Lord Krishna. The Vedas also point out this Truth that the Lord is Perfect and there can be no increase or decrease in the energy of the Lord. The Vedas say that only the complete can produce something that is complete. As such the Vedas say that the Lord remains whole even though the whole of creation emanates from him and is supported by him. Whatever is produced of the complete whole is also complete in itself. Thus no matter what is produced by the Lord he remains in "complete balance" and there is no disturbance, in the cosmic mind.

The path of devotion is a difficult one and has in its way many by lanes. Maya the Lord's power of Illusion fools everyone at every turn of the road and makes them fall on the path. The way out of this conundrum is surrender to Lord Krishna for only then will he accept us and guide us back to the Godhead. Not surrendering to the Lord is a gross sin. Thus it is only the science of Krishna Consciousness that can release the world from the hands that are forcing the world into an ever tighter situation so far as lasting world peace is concerned. The chanting of Krishna's mantra will certainly change all this quickly and completely.

Srila has pointed out that the path of Pantanjali which has eight parts to it and yogi's following this path master it until they are immersed in deep consciousness or Samadhi. In their drive for the goal of perfection they are able to withstand the worst of all privations and difficulties. When they finally emerge from their trials and tribulations they have mastered a state of consciousness which cannot be disturbed by any outward changes in condition and fortune. Srila says that in this perfect condition nothing

is fearful not even death. Lord Krishna says about such yogis that it has been recorded that they are (Bhagavad Gita 6.22).

Being thus, he never departs from the truth  
And on gaining this he feels there is no greater gain  
Established in such a situation, he is never shaken  
Even in the middle of the greatest problem, or difficulty.

## 24.8 The Eight Mystical Perfections

Talking of this verse Srila says that when the spirit is detached and one is established in Samadhi then the spiritual self is perceived and the yogi perceives the intense bliss of Brahman as is it were absorbing the yogi. He becomes the possessor of what Srila calls "eight mystic perfections". That is he develops supernatural and mystical powers due to his spiritual practice. The eight mystic perfections are told by lord Krishna in the Srimad Bagavatam (11.15.4-5). They are given here to indicate the kind of mystic cosmology is believed in by the Hare Krishnas.

- 1) The first of the eight mystic perfections is called anima and comprises becoming smaller than the smallest. This is not only a physical quality or power but also implies that attribute of humility where the self is placed last before the self of others.
- 2) The second mystic perfection is mahima or becoming greater than the greatest. Again this not just a physical power but also the capacity of he sage to tower over ordinary men due to the depth and clarity of their wisdom.
- 3) The third mystic perfection is Loghma or becoming lighter than the lightest. Again this not just an ability to walk over water but to embody a personality which is very unobtrusive as Jung would put it has hardly the trace of a shadow, and is therefore very light and buoyant in its mood and temperament. As we are seeing these powers develop through the spiritual practice of Patanjali yoga.
- 4) The next mystic perfection is that of prapti that is of acquiring anything that one desires. This again comprises not only of being able to get or materialize anything they desire. It also refers to the fact that the yogi can get anything he desires but he desires nothing and thus has all he wants, his wants being satisfied and under his control.
- 5) The fifth mystic perfection is that of prakamya in which any object can be enjoyed. This is a very real mental power but is also refers to the fact that the yogi has the power of concentration and imagination which becomes acute in such accomplished yogis.
- 6) The next perfection which the yogi develops is called *isita* or the ability to manipulate maya itself and create cities and palaces in the field of conscious reality. On the other hand it means that such a yogi understands the lures of maya and is not trapped in them. Maya is a power that keep even the best of yogis in its thralls and prevents their spiritual progress.
- 7) The next mystic perfection of the Patanjali yogis is called vasita which implies the yogi has gone beyond sattva rajas and tamas and is established in his dhyan. Having overcome these three material modes the yogi is not trapped in the relatives of good and bad and develops objectivity of perception.

- 8) The last of the siddhis or yogis power that the yogi gets from Patanjali yoga is the ability to obtain anything from anywhere. Here although the question of the ability to materialize is obvious it is also pertinent to note that he psyche is what is the arena of power and the yogi is after spiritual realization. As such, these kinds of power are usually not used.

#### Reflection and Action 24.2

Talk to ISKCON devotees about mystical perfections. Are they at all common? Write down in your notebook.

These powers are the products of his yogic practice and this has often led to some yogis who have mastered one to more mystic perfections or siddhis to pretend they have mastered the rest of them as well, and it may well be pointed out that such impatience and restlessness are impediments to Samadhi.

On the other hand for the Karma yogi such siddhi are impediments to Samadhi. The karma yogis mind remains fixed on service to Lord Krishna. He is constantly chanting the mantra of Hare Krishna in his mind. Doing this he mind and heart remain fixed on the goal and Srila says he is always in Samadhi, which is the ultimate goal as it unites us with Krishna consciousness. Being in Krishna consciousness his bliss is supreme and cannot be described and is inconceivable.

Srila feels that Patanjali yoga as a path does not measure up to the devotional chanting and service of Lord Sri Krishna. However, Srila is quick to point out that no work on the spiritual path is lost and that one gains by every effort. The yogi may not reach his goal in one lifetime but he is sure to reach it in a future life. All the karma and spiritual progress will be accumulated and accredited to the next life. However, when a materialistic person dies his wealth is all left behind and he dies not have a spiritual bank balance. It all becomes "null and void". As concerns the Hare Krishna devotee his deeds are beyond the level of mind and body. His is a Krishna consciousness which transcends all others and makes for a happy journey back to the God head Sri Krishna who is the common goal.

At this point we must discuss devotional service to the lord. When a man works he usually has some selfish goal in mind and hopes for many rewards. But this is not the work which can be called devotional or sacrificial. If a man works devoting everything to Lord Sri Krishna then his work will not carry the germs of future Karma and his acts will transcend matter. The man of sacrifice is such that he does nothing unthinkingly and always dedicates each and every action to the Lord. By doing this he is attaining proximity to the Lord and is washing himself clean. If a man thinks "I will work and become rich" this is not an act of transcendence or sacrifice. This is simply a selfish goal and has personal motives and as such is an action which does not have much spiritual worth. Thus Srila says that we must following Sri Krishna's advice dedicate everything to Him from the smallest to the greatest actions. If a man say "Everything I do, every breath I take is devoted and offered to Sri Krishna" then this attitude is called the attitude of sacrifice. From the attitude of sacrifice flows the action of spirituality that is true and pure. Such a person is dear not only to God but to all his near and dear ones. Sri Krishna warns his devotees that nothing is possible in this world without spiritualized action. Thus it is said in the Gita that the person who works devotedly and is a pure person who controls his mind and senses. Such a person is never entangled in work even while he is working why? This is simply because he is sacrificing everything and every action to the Lord.

On the other hand is the person who is inclined to enjoy the pleasures of the senses and to gratify them. The spirit of such people starts to fall into lower and lower forms of consciousness; and each action of theirs binds them to their bad karma more and more. This is not a case of the Lord favouring or not favouring certain souls but a consequences of the Laws of nature. Those who are struggling against material things and sensations constantly strengthen their spirit for Moksha the ultimate merging into the pure soul of Brahman whose very core is Sri Krishna himself. Thus to forget God while living in this world is no less than a calamity because this means that a person is doomed from the start. Sacrifice requires god awareness and god consciousness. The Bhagavad Gita (5.14) points out that the spirit in this body is not responsible for creating activities. He does not make people act nor does he create the fruits that accrue to action. All these things are done by the modes of nature acting upon each other.

## 24.9 Types of Devotion an Devotees

We may point out there are various types of action and various types of people. They may be divided into

- 1) Sattvic guna
- 2) rajasic guna
- 3) tamasic guna

The people of the Sattvic guna have purity of purpose and are god fearing people. They do not want to fight and compete for every little thing. They also don't want to claim superiority of thought or action. They are not proud and vain. Such people of humble and pure disposition are such that they always strive for Sri Krishna and always dedicate their action to Him.

The rajasi are the hedonists and the tamasic guru people are lazy, indolent and slothful. How then can such people hope to attain peace of mind and salvation? To clarify all these points Krishna says that a man must be a karma yogi. A man who acts for the sake of doing good actions while at the same time renouncing the fruits of such action. Krishna says that (Bhagavad Gita 5.29).

Those in full consciousness of Me, Knowing Me to be the ultimate receiver of all sacrifices and austerity

Supreme Lord of all planets

The well wisher of all living beings

Attains spiritual peace.

Thus it becomes clear that action that is rajasic or tamasic is strictly to be avoided by the devotees of Sri Krishna. The rajasic man in who the guna of all intoxication, pleasure, thrills and gluttony are predominant can never conceive of dedicating his life to the good of the people and the best of humanity. However, it is true as we pointed out there are different types of people with different types of dispositions. Krishna consciousness is also not possible for those people who are not willing to put in any effort to improve their lot and face life as it comes and do their best in the name of the Lord. Thus yoga which means union with the Lord is possible only after withdrawing from the world and meditation before taking action. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita (6.1)

A person who is not attached

To the outcomes of his work

Is a true mystic

Not he who lights no fire

Or performs no duty

The karma yogi knows it is due to the Lord that he is acting and that it is the three material modes that act and interact upon each other. Therefore, he renounces the actions he does by dedicating them to the Lord. His mind is always on Lord Krishna and the mantra of Hare Krishna always raises his Krishna consciousness. As such he is always in a clear calm and relaxed mood and is always cheerful. His Krishna consciousness has recalled that the Lord shines equally on everyone just like the sun who gives his rays to everyone without discrimination. They the real karma-yogis are the true devotees of the Lord. They have through their ceaseless and untiring efforts dedicated everything, even their bodies to the Lord what to say of mind and spirit. They have in fact attained perfection. In such a state they develop supernatural powers and abilities to understand.

We now cover Srila Prabhupada views on devotion to the Lord as per his interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita. According to Srila the message of the Gita is very simple and easy to understand. According to him the message of the Gita is such that there is no room for alternative interpretations or understanding. That is to say the message of the Gita, according to Srila, is universal and not applicable to some one country or a local context. So also the devotees of the Lord are spread out all over the world and not restricted to one country alone. These devotees are according to Srila a class apart and form a superior spiritual fraternity of those who follow the teachings of Sri Krishna. Thus, as Srila notes "God is not the monopoly of any particular group" or class. The message of the Gita is a universal message to each and every soul and can be followed by each and every soul also. Lord Krishna has unequivocally declared this in Bhagavad Gita (9.2) that through worship of the Lord even the minority and weaker sections of the society can gain liberation.

Srila is at pains to point out that certain portions of the Gita are deliberately interpreted in a capricious manner especially the teaching regarding caste divisions. According to Bhagavad Gita (4.13) Lord Krishna points out that the various division of labour is created from material conditions. He points out that the four divisions of society are also created by Him. Srila points out that there are four divisions of society according to the Gita and there are:

- 1) Intellectuals
- 2) Administrators
- 3) Merchants
- 4) Labourers

These divisions of labour should not says Srila, be determined by birth but by merit.

This is the same as when one becomes a high official by merit and not by birth right alone. In the world of three modes of material nature (rajas, tamas, sattva) social classes have always had a presence. As such Srila points out that birth should not be the criteria to determine caste or class. The four classes he says were created according to the qualification of a person. Srila points out that just as some essential services like that of medicine and doctors are available in all country similarly the four classes (as Srila refers to these divisions) of men are to be found in all

cultures. As things exist today the son of a doctor may not become a doctor; similarly the son of an administrator may not become an administrator. In a similar way the offspring of the four classes of men does not imply that the future of these children is fixed permanently and automatically as their parents. Thus, the whole notion of caste is questioned by Srila so far as is its usual interpretation is concerned. We should not feel that caste exists in one country or what that caste should imply. The divisions of society as promulgated by Gita are the same everywhere in the world and in all countries. Srila is critical of the hereditary approach to caste where in each caste the only option to the progeny was the same occupation as the parents or the father. This 'restricts' the Indian culture and is a very narrow minded approach to the four classes of man. Srila feels much harm has been done by this and notes that the proper propagation of brahmanical culture would have benefited the world greatly.

Srila points out that varanashrama-dharma, which is what comprises the four spiritual orders and the four spiritual classes is binodal: it is either demoniac or transcendental. The two are diametrically opposed to each other. The social divisions are universal. Srila points out that a person with scriptural knowledge can pinpoint and discuss the four classes. Thus the four classes are seen everywhere and in all societies. The intellectual is present in all societies and makes the ideological climate of the society in which he or she is working. On him or her depends on the direction in which the society is going to go. The administrator too is present in each society and sees to it that all aspects of society interact and go together. That there are, no injustice administration and inequities in distribution. So also the merchant is in all societies not just the Indian subcontinent and ensures the smooth running of trade and business. The labourer too, is present in all societies and helps to construct buildings, dig trenches, and take up the physical maintenance of the society and its various material artifacts. Thus, it is a gross mistake to think that "brahmanas and the other three castes" exist only in India. The scriptures have pronounced that in Kalyuga everyone is born a Sudra. It is then the merit alone which counts.

We must note here that what Srila is giving to us is what may be termed as a transcendental view of caste in which the country specific nature of the phenomena is called to question. However, it is better as sociologists to keep in mind that the caste or jati reality still exists in India. We can talk about caste but we must distinguish it from varna. Thus, there are only four varnas or classes but there are thousands of castes of jatis which exist in India both rural and urban which are the basis of major decisions like marriage.

## 24.10 Conclusion

The situation can then be aptly described as one where the wandering souls, according to karma find better or worse situations facing them. In Sri Caitanya-charitamrita (Madhya 19.151) the Lord says, that it is according to their various types of karma the living entities are moving around in the creation of the Lord. Some of these souls get an elevated consciousness and in others the consciousness gets dimmed. Of many millions of these wandering souls only those who are fortunate get in touch with a real spiritual master by the grace of Lord Krishna. By the mercy of the spiritual master and the Lord the seed of devotion is available in the Bhagavad Gita. It is the duty of everyone to render him loving devotional service. In doing this all the other subsidiary duties are also subsumed.

## 24.11 Further Reading

Hare Krishna Movement

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## Unit 25

# Radhasoami Satsang

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### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- Provide salient features of Sant Mat;
- Describe the Life teachings of the patron guru;
- Give details about the teachings and techniques of Radhasoami Satsang; and
- Outline the teachings of other Radhasoami Sects.

### 25.1 Introduction

It would be better if we began our presentation of the Radhasoami Satsang with a given background in spirituality to provide us the right perspective regarding Sant mat the approach that we will be talking about. Spirituality is the area which we are concerned with and not specifically religion which covers a wide canons of rituals and litanies. Thus we must make a distinction between religion and spirituality because Sant mat is concerned with inner practices of a spiritual nature and it is not specifically a religion through it has its religious side to it. On the other hand religion is a body of data which has many facts, rites, rituals and beliefs which impact upon the followers of that religion. Religion follows domestic prayer rituals, has festivals, an ordained priesthood, and is either converted into or born into. Sant mat is based on spirituality and there are spiritual practices to elevate spirituality. There are few rituals but they are different in that they are inner practices and do not have outer but inner significance.

It is clear then that there is a relationship of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ between spirituality and religion. In our case spirituality is the inner core, the esoteric side of religion and Sant mat is at the core of religion. The place of Sant mat is not conflictual with any religion or any specific religion, it is simply the practice of spirituality which has come down to us over untold ages and has been reformulated according to various saints and mystics many of whom set up movements to popularize the Sant mat. Others remained in small groups or communities not preaching and proselytizing to the masses but pursuing their spiritual interests quietly

and out of the public eye. So we can now locate Sant mat as part of the ancient traditions of spirituality typified by a master and his disciples all of whom are ultimate allegiance to the master and their co disciples and often live as a community.

Attached to these spiritual movements are other institutions like educational institutions and hospitals. The disciples are encouraged to serve the master and the movement in any possible way including complete surrender of body mind and soul to the master. It can then be seen that is type of movement is such that total allegiance is what is expected as is the case of secret societies. The guru/masters word is law and it cannot be contravened by any disciple. Again there is a minimum amount of various types of dhyan or meditation which has to be performed by the disciples. An important aspect of such spiritual communities is that there is a great emphasis on "Satsangh" or "Sangat", that is the company of the followers or disciples. This is to socialize the disciples into talking about the wonders and achievements possible with the help of Sant Mat meditations. Satsangh also has the meaning of the discourse of the guru listening to which is one of the ways of ascending the hierarchical ladder of Sant Mat spirituality. The food to be taken two is strictly vegetarian and there has to be an abstinence from meat alcohol and narcotic drugs.

Thus what we are talking about here is a total lifestyle. We will concentrate upon the Radhasoami Math or Satsang is Beas, Punjab. There are two other Radahsoami Satsangs both in Agra U.P. at Soami Bagh and Dayal Bagh respectively. As for Saomi Bagh Radhasoami Satsang it does not believe in proselytizing and as such it is of limited numbers. Again relative to Beas the Dayal Bagh group is limited in numbers. However, as regards the spiritual lifestyle and practices there is a great deal of similarity although they are not identical by any means. So then we speak of Radhasoami (Beas) we will be shedding the light on the Radhasoami movement as a whole although as we noted there are differences and divergences also in these groups.

## 25.2 Sant Mat: Some Aspects

Radhasoami (Beas) has been described as Sant Mat which can be translated as the Path of the Masters. A path which has to be followed and trodden upon by the disciples of the Master and the Master has to be a living person. The emphasis on the living master is most important in Sant Mat. We can then say along with Maharaj Charan Singh that Radhasoami Satsang Beas is a way of God realization while living in the body the effects of which impact upon the daily life of the aspirant in a most positive way. Radhasoami Satsang provides practical training in spirituality. Charan Singh notes that the Satsang is not a religion because it does not have any fixed outward signs and symptoms like priesthood and temples, dogmas and rituals. This is true in a limited sense only since belief patterns, dhyan, darshan, initiation (diksa) and so on do have a reflection of dogma and rituals. But clearly this is not so reified as in the major religions of the world. The method consist of turning the attention in ward while at the same time taking care of all the various responsibilities that are to do with living in the world—that is responsibilities towards family, relatives, friends, community and so on. The Sant Mat points out that all misery in the world and all the sorrow and pain of living is because there is a separation of mind intellect and the supreme self or God. It is pointed out by Radhasoami Satsang teachings that the world of matter is not the real home or abode but simply a passage that is undergone on earth. It follows correctly and logically within this belief system that unless the separation from the Supreme is bridged completely sorrow and misery cannot abate,

let alone be eliminated. As noted earlier it is not at all necessary to search for this spiritual union anywhere apart from the human body itself. In this teaching then the body itself is regarded as sacred and the true place of worship. It is the temple of God.

Another principle is that the teachings of the Saints are similar all over world and time and space do not make a difference to these teachings. It is held that these teachings are universal in applicability and have been used since time immemorial. Not only this the teachings are held to be true for all time including the future.

### Sant Mat Methods

At this point we would like to introduce the methods which are used by the Radhasoami Satsang to help elevate the spirit.

First is the repetition of the name of the Supreme and this practice is known as *Simran*. As ever the idea of repeating the names of God is to make the vibration of the body come in close synchronization with the ultimate vibration of God and therefore create an all around benefit to the devotee.

The next technique that is taught is meditation on the form of the Master who is in fact the reflection and representative of God on earth, as believed by his disciples. The meditation on the form of the Master also means that the radiant quality of the Master when meditated upon creates great spiritual waves and uplifting currents in the mind of the meditator and thus creates a feeling of bliss and happiness for the disciple.

The third technique is listening to the "unstruck sound" or word that creates spiritual alignment as this spiritual current is moving through the body all the time. This sound has a melodic aspect to it and washes away the impurities within the mind and intellect and spiritualizes them with the help of meditation on this current the soul of man rises higher and higher until the whole of it is absorbed by the Supreme or God.

With the help of these techniques the soul is able to free itself of bondage, misery, sorrow and attachment to worldly objects and man is able to live in the world without blemish and with detachment. This is in fact one of the signs that the meditations are being effective on the disciple.

#### Box 25.1 Initiation and Meditation

As regards the diet of the Radhasoami Satsangi the prescribed food has to be lacto vegetarian, and to lead to a moral responsible life. These is to be no usage of tobacco or narcotics in the life of a satsangi. The satsangi is not required to give up life in an active occupation and must work for a living. Further the Radhasoami initiation is a secret and personal experience and must not be revealed to anyone. Further we find that the spiritual revelations during meditation experiences are also to kept secret and not to be shared with anyone as this can set up competition among the disciples and is also a good to personal variety or even personal depression if the meditation practices are not going well. This could well mean that the spiritual ascent of the disciples breaking this rule could be stymied.

There is yet another significant fact about Sant mat and this is that the master and his group of satsangis are against accepting money for any Sant mat activities. A true saint according to Sant mat perception never accepts money from anyone including the disciples. This is a correct principle since the acceptance of money from a disciple or anyone else means the loss of objectivity in personal dealings.

## 25.3 Patron Guru and Founding Masters

Radhasoami Satsang

The patron guru or first and founding master of Radhasoami Satsang was called Shiv Dayal Singh or "Soami ji" to his disciples. He was the first one to introduce the "new" spiritual discipline in Agra in the year 1861, in north India. This new spiritual method was known as "Surat Shabd Yoga" or the yoga of the sound current. Through Surat Shabd Yoga the spirit is able to concentrate all its energies for spiritual life and for spiritual liberation. In fact it is the means of leaving bondage and reaching out beyond sorrow and misery. The meditation techniques of Surat Shabd Yoga have to be awakened by a living master and only then do they become proactive and effective in meditation and be of real help to the disciple. Thus the initiation by the living master is the key to the beginning of spiritual life and is able to go beyond the negative forces of Kal which rule the lower regions of the mind and drag down the senses of mankind. Thus the contribution of "Soami ji" is recognised as the founder of Radhasoami Satsang by all the branches of the Radhasoami movement.

Now before we go on to tell about the Radhasoami Beas masters, that is the masters who are recognized by the largest branch of the Radhasoami faith let us dwell a bit on the meaning of the name itself. According to the masters Radhasoami is divided into two names that is Radha and Soami. Note that the second word is "Soami" and not "Swami" although it is sometimes spelt that way. Radha is the name given to the atman or soul and soami is the name given to the Lord. So the Radhasoami teachings are those of a way a path to the realization of the Supreme and which involve a method or methods by which this can be done. Turning now to a description of the Radhasoami masters we find that all branches of Radhasoami sect owe allegiance to and recognize Soamiji Maharaj as the founder master of the Radhasoami sect. After Soamiji Maharaj the different sects in Agra and Beas have their own lineage of masters. We are concerned with Radhasoami (Beas) as it is by far the largest sect having an estimated 2 million followers in India and the world over. To continue Soamiji Maharaj was the first and universally recognised master of the Radhasoami's. He was the first to begin the teachings of the faith that is known as the Radhasoami today. The parental name of Soamiji Maharaj happened to be Seth Shivdayal Singh, and it was only after he had declared his mission that his followers began to call him Soamiji Maharaj. The mother and father of Shivdayal Singh were pious and godfearing and were the close devotees of the master Tulsi Sahib, who hailed from Hathras in India. He was born on 25 August 1818 in Panni street in Agra and was an unusual child who was interested in the spiritual from very early childhood and it was on seeing this unusual trait of Shivdayal Singh that Tulsi of Hathras initiated him into Sant Mat at the tender age of six years itself. This is highly unusual because Santon ki Shiksa is usually initiated at a much more mature age when the devotee can put in time and effort at the spiritual practices that the initiation into Sant Mat requires if any spiritual progress is to take place. Shiv Dayal Singh as we said was an unusual and spiritually archived child hence this early age of initiation to Sant Mat by Tulsi Sahib of Hathras.

### Tulsi Sahib and Shiv Dayal

Tulsi Sahib had seen something very different in Shiv Dayal and had initiated him because of this perception. Shiv Dayal practiced the Surat Shabd yoga (which we will discuss in a later part) for well over 15 years and became a great spiritual adept and later he had the urge to share his gyan with all those willing to follow the instructions that were required to do so. The Satsang was started on Vasant Panchami in the spring of the year 1861 when he was in his forties and he continued to head the Satsang for 17

years until his death on June 5, 1878 in Panni Street where he had been born almost 60 years ago. Soamiji had named his approach to spirituality as 'Satnaam Anaami' at first but on the suggestion of a close follower he decided to call it "Radhasoami" and ever since then the spiritual approach has/ had the same name. Radhasoami philosophy has influenced and sparked off movements which have taken its philosophy whole or in part. Soamiji described his approach to spirituality in books which he wrote in two parts called "Saar Vachan Chhand Band" and the second part was called "Sar Vachan Vartik".

Soamiji's discourses have also been published. He was a true saint and never accepted anything for personal use; rather he spent what he had for the cause. Soamiji Maharaj was then a mystic of the first water and was an embodiment of the highest principles of self-realization. To him the soul of man could be compared to Radha, and the goal of Radha is to be fused into her lord or Soami the endless eternal reality. The two names combined give us Radhasoami. At this point we must clarify that this Radha is not the Radha of the Indian tradition of Radha and Krishna which is a different from the Radha of Radhasoami. Soamiji insisted that his followers should desist from alcohol narcotics and be vegetarian as these substances create obstacles in the way to spiritual practices and meditation by exciting the senses and confusing the mind. Hence, they are taboo in the Radhasoami faith.

A most remarkable aspect of Soamiji Maharaj was that he was not interested in spreading the knowledge he was discoursing on and initiating members into. He went to the extent of forbidding any propaganda through the newspapers to attract disciples who he believed would come through their own interests and their individual karma. Apart from a high moral life Soamiji Maharaj insisted on a practice of 2 hours of meditation. Each devotee was expected to practice 2 hours of Surat Shabd Yoga. In short it was a pretty rigorous type of discipline which was expected from his followers. Despite these rigorous requirements by the 1850's there were several followers of Soamiji Maharaj. This group of followers expanded over the years and the popularity and acceptability of his teachings reached many thousands of devotees by his death in 1878.

#### Action and Reflection 25.1

Outline what led to the formation of individual Radhasoami Satsangs? Ask Radhasoami members why all Radhasoami satsangs recognize Soamiji as Patron guru.

This was however, an event which led to the formation of several splits in Soamiji's movement and this was because he did not name or appoint a successor before his death in 1878. Once he had died there was for several years a kind of chaos because no successor had been appointed. Under these circumstances the disciples close to him each began to run a Satsang and be the head of that particular split group. There were six aspirants for succession and they led the Radhasoami faith. This split remains and it is because of this that the movement spread beyond the limits of Agra and became a national and later international movement in the field of spirituality, although there were variations in the teachings to an extent.

### 25.4 Formation of Individual Satsangs

Individual Satsangs were formed by close disciples of Soamiji Maharaj including Radhaji his wife, Rai Saligram, Partap Singh and other followers. A prominent disciple Jaimal Singh however, went to Beas in Punjab and

established a Satsang there on the banks of the river. This Satsang became the one which flourished the most and is the most well known of all Radhasoami Satsang's today. The followers of the Beas Radhasoami Satsang are the most numerous and are more than the total of all the Radhasoami Satsangs across the world. It is without doubt the most popular of all the Satsangs. The founder of this Beas Satsang was Jaimal Singhji Maharaj as has been mentioned. Jaimal Singh was also known as Babaji Maharaj. The Beas Satsang was established by him in 1891 that is more than ten years after the death of Soamiji in 1878. This Satsang is now an autonomous body with no specific links with other branches of Radhasoamis. Jaimal Singh was a Punjabi Sikh who was much taken up and inspired by the teachings and the discourse of Soamiji Maharaj and had become his follower and disciple.

Some years after Soamiji had taken Maha Samadhi in 1878 and had named so successor he set up the dera or camp three miles cast of Beas village, close to Baba Bakala town on the northern banks of Beas river. That area in which Babaji Maharaj settled down is now known, as it was then as Dera Baba Jaimal Singh. This is the contemporary center of Beas Radhasoamis. After the demise of Babaji Maharaj he was succeeded by Baba Sawan Singh who as the name suggests was also a Sikh like his guru. He was a native of Narangwal Village in the district of Ludhiana in Punjab. Again following the Maha Samadhi of Baba Sawan Singh he was succeeded by Baba Charan Singh. The headquarters of the sect was retained by these gurus as their headquarters for spiritual practices.

We find that Radhasoami Beas followers were greatly influenced by the bible of the Sikhs, the Granth Sahib. It goes however, to their credit that they do not try to bring in parallels with mainstream Sikhism. Nor is there any attempt to try and brings up compassion with their movement and that of Sikhsms 10 gurus.

### **Babaji Maharaj**

When Babaji Maharaj established his dera in Beas he had built a tiny Shanty about 9 sq. ft. in area. At present in that same area is a large and beautiful colony which is calm, quiet and peaceful and a perfect place for Surat Shabd yoga.

Now Babaji Maharaj died in 1903 and it was Maharaj Sawan Singh ji who was now the Successor. Sawan Singh has as his priority the propogating the philosophy and teachings of the math. He was utterly successful in his efforts and started to draw as international following from Europe, North America, Africa and Asia itself. During the gurudom of Sawan Singh the Beas Ashram prospered greatly and over 1903-1948 the Dera grew all round both spiritually and materially in terms of devotees and the buildings. The boundaries of the ashram spread to thousands of square yards. At first on the property of the Dera there were tiny rooms which later transformed under Sawan's leadership into a beautiful and well laid out colony.

### **Sawan Singh and Charan Singh**

Sawan Singh after a most fruitful time passed way in 1948. He was over 90 years old. In his will he gave his personal and private property to his family and the religious property he was responsible for to his successor who was called Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh ji.

This guru died after 4 years in the seat in 1951 and named Maharaj Charan Singh as the master. Maharaj Charan Singh himself died in 1990 but dictated two days before he died that his nephew Gurinder Singh

Dhillon would succeed him, and today he is the guru of the Radhasoami sect Beas.

The objectives which were followed by all the Beas gurus include spreading of spiritual knowledge as per the Radhasoami faith of Beas. They also arranged discourses to fulfill this purpose. Further a day and night kitchen or Langar was run by the organization to give free meals to the visiting mendicants and the followers. The Satsang was also made possible to the production, publication, as well as distribution of Radhasoami literature. Finally, the objective was to run a hospital near the Dera. A word about Radhasoamis in the West should close this section on the gurus of Radhasoami Beas. The Radhasoami sect prospered most in the U.S. and this country is known for its religious catholicity. We find that in 1933 Sawan Singh ji gave one Harvey Meyers authority to represent the faith in the US. James Replogle was asked to do the initiations in the Midwest and East, while Meyers retained the West Coast. Meyers had been a devotee of both Sawan Singh and Jagat Singh his successor. In 1951 when Charan Singh took over the seat the Radhasoami following in the US expanded very rapidly. Under his two forbear gurus the US initiates were in hundreds in Charan Singh's time they rose over 10,000 in number. Today there is a Board of Trustees which looks after the work in the US.

### Gurinder Singh

The current master Gurinder Singh has done a lot for streamlining administration of the Satsangs and Seva. He has improved the Satsang in an all round manner. It is Gurinder Singh who has fixed the age for disciplehood and initiation to the age of 25. The initiation instructions which had been printed have been greatly revised. Gurinder Singh ji also edits newsletters and has built many new centers for the Satsang world wide. He travels all over the globe to spread the teachings of the Radhasoami. This has added greatly to the already monumental popularity of Radhasoami Satsang (Beas).

### The Spiritual Background

We now turn to that part of the overall underpinning which is common to the various different but similar sects of the Radhasoami faith. These have both borrowed form and been inspired by the medieval saints and mystics both Hindu and Muslim (like Tulsi, Dadu, Kabir etc) and are Sufi in their interpretations. Today some of the sects are trying to change the original terminology of the Radhasoami faith in order to reach out to a wider audience but here we will retain the original conceptualization as far as possible. However, we will also point out in the new terminology what the actual equivalents are. For example many times "God" is used instead of "Radhasoami Dayal" which is a wrong way of conceptualizing the latter as "God" is a specifically Christian usage and does not fit in with the social and mystical approach of the Radhasoami.

It is also to be noted that many discourses of the Radhasoami gurus were and are couched in commentaries or explanations of one or several of the couplets or dohas of one or more of the mystic saints of medieval India and even Persia, like Shams-e-Tabre and Jalal-ud-din Rumi. As such the commentaries though similar are quite capable of emphasizing one or other of the aspects of the couplet though the general overall perspective remains the same or similar. This is definitely one important aspect of the Radhasoami teaching. The idea is that man is not the final destination but that part of the man, the soul has to seek union with the Supreme soul. It is pointed out that the body is comprised of specifically five elements which are earth, water, air, fire and ether. At the time of death or pralaya we find that these elements revert back to their original source.

Thus the earth part is absorbed into the soil as various chemicals bones ashes and so on and the water air fire and ether also rejoin the parent bodies of these elements in the environment. The mind of man goes to Niranjan or Kaal. Each of the elements which is released during death experiences a release as it rejoins its parent body and similarly it is pointed out that when atman is released from the cycles of transmigration it will experience a great sense of happiness, bliss, relief and contentment as it is going back to Radhasoami Dham to unite there in the presence of Radhasoami Dayal. Thus the whole purpose of creation is paradoxically to go back to the creator. The whole play on the cosmic scale and the human scale is to reunite the soul of man blissfully with the oversoul.

#### **Box 25.2 The Inner Self**

Many saints have expressed this return to paradise in many different ways. for example Jesus said "Know the Inner Self" and guru Nanak said and has opined that there must be a psychological or mental death before physical death obviates this. Now this does not mean that knowing the Father or knowing the self is some kind of mental illness or derangement. Nor does the "death before death" mean some kind of suicide. In fact what is being referenced to is the detachment of the mind and intellect from all the factors that keep it bounded. That is the death that the saints refer to in fact as liberation during the lifetime itself and such a saint is known as jivan. That is a mystic or saint who has realized Radhasoami Dham, the ultimate abode of the Supreme and has merged with it. Only such a person is in fact qualified to be a Sadguru because the spirit of a Sadguru like Soamiji is resting in the bosom of the Supreme. It is only because of this very important feature that they can teach, initiate, meditate and in turn liberate the souls of the devotees who have developed love devotion and have surrendered at the Holy Feet of Sadguru. Thus to die is man's ordinary fate and the elements go back to the elements. Yet the liberation of atman from transmigration is possible only by the compassion and Mercy of Sadguru.

Death of the type that is made of the purification of the mind from all gross desires and sensualities means that the atman has united with Parmatman. It is Sadguru who teaches this way of dying to the world and all its various attractions by teaching the method of meditation at the time of initiation. By initiating into the Naam and other meditations a new possibility opens up which is that mans liberated soul can truly enjoy being in the world without misery and sorrow. It remains diffused in the body mind and intellect but these have been purified by the penance of meditation, devotion and seva of the guru, by love of the guru and by keeping to the rules regarding vegetarian diet and the abstinence from all narcotics. Such a person is fit in fact to be a guru and is himself able to give the right instructions to bring about liberation in those who have entrusted themselves to his care. Just as Radhasoami Dayal is the power that is the father of all the creation so also he is the father of all mankind. Similarly, the guru in the Radhasoami tradition is in fact the father or parent of all his disciples and they are his children.

## **25.5 The Naam, Mythology and Cosmology**

Now a word about 'Naam' or 'Word' which is so crucially important in the journey to Radhasoami Dham. What is this word and what makes it so important as a vehicle that will liberate the devotee when meditated upon. The word came into existence without any external agency. As has been said in the Bible, New Testament "In the beginning was the word, and the word was God, and the word is God'.

Thus it is the naam or word which created everything from cosmic phenomena down to the smallest atom. According to Radhasoami philosophy the power of the word created many powers including God. Each of these has its own specific meanings and functions and the humans soul has to go through these regions before it reaches the final goal of liberation. This power of the word has created for example the "nameless region" or the Anami Desh. It has also created Agam Desh or the inaccessible region. It has further created Alakh Desh or invisible region and so on. Each of those regions including Saach Khand are hierarchically arranged in an order of ascension from one to sixteen.

Now further the spiritual current coming from Anami Desh at Sach Khand and was called Satnaam. From Satnaam were created a further two regions called Bhanwar Gupha and Daswan Dwar and these regions had their own words and resonance to reach them. They in fact became the Naam which was suited for some types of meditation.

In other words we find that there is a elaborate mythology and cosmology of the ascent of the spirit to the ultimate goal and destination. Which each region that is described such as Bhanwar Gupha and Daswan Dwar has a name or mantra for it is only the Sadguru or his close disciples who can tell about it as we are not talking primarily in terms of physical structures but conglomerations of the consciousness. The sixteen created regions each has a mantra attached to it and there are many sects in India which do not go beyond the first few conglomerations of consciousness and establish a religion on that basis. This is called a cosmology, a mythology, or a philosophy of Sant Mat because this has to be taken on trust and becomes a fact to the disciple after he puts in many years of meditation on the Shabad itself. Even then this is a somewhat esoteric part of Radhasoami faith and it is only recently that mention has been made of it as it is liable to be misunderstood or simply be difficult to understand. Shabad or naam or word the Radhasoami faith declares is the very source of the world and is ultimately the reason for its ending. In the meanwhile it is Shabad itself which keeps creation going round. It has been pointed out that Shabad created two areas of consciousness the Trikuti (Brahma) and Sahasradal Kanwal. Radhasoami faith now links up the cosmology with the human body and points out that these are six ganglions or chakras in the human body from the back of the eyes to the top of the head, right up to the region of the paramatman. Again similar ganglions or chakras are present from the bottom of the feet up to the eyes themselves. It is felt by the Radhasoami that is not very necessary to give vast and detailed descriptions of the six chakras in the bottom part of the body because the journey they are undertaking is of the six chakras from the back of the eyes to the Anami Desh. However, they do point out that those gurus and disciples who concentrate upon the lower chakras will obviously remain at a lower elevation, and can go at the most to Brahmas level. The disciples then get lodged during life or at the time of death at one or other of these lower ganglions or chakras. Radhasoami faith points out that at the onset of human beings death the atman begins to withdraw itself from the nails of the hand and the feet and starts traveling upwards towards the head. At this juncture it needs to be pointed out and indicated that Radhasoami faith talks of two types of death.

### Two Types of Death

One type of death is the ordinary death in which the soul gradually withdraws and leaves the body by itself. This may be called automatic or unconscious death. The second type of death is a conscious death in which the satsangi retracts the soul through the practice of meditation and leaves the body. The satsangi is prostrate like a dead person but the

breathing and critical life functions go on happening. When this conscious meditational death occurs we find that the yoga practitioner or satsangi retracts his soul to begin the ascension within the body itself and reaches at first the Guda ganglion or Chakra also known as the rectal plexus. This is the chakra which is associated with Lord Ganesh who is the emblem and dispenser of all material comforts wealth and prosperity, the reason for this God being the first to be worshipped in any prayer. Ganesh Puja begins all other rites and rituals. At this center there is a four petalled lotus and this chakra contains the element of earth. Next the travelling soul reaches the Indri chakra or genital plexus. This chakra comprises of the element of water and is associated with the liquid. The master and mistress of this centre are Brahma and Savitri and this is the centre of creation, and it is Brahma who creates this world. There is in this region a six petalled lotus and this is what it is represented by in popular yogic descriptions. The soul traveller then goes further upward and reaches the centre of the Nabhi chakra or the navel centre, and this centre is represented by the element of fire. The God Vishnu and his consort Laxmi is the ruler of this centre. They are the ones responsible for the continuation of the world. This centre is represented by an eight- petalled lotus. The soul then reaches the Hridaya chakra or the Heart Centre. This is the chakra where Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati reside. They are the rulers of the Heart Centre. The onus of the ultimate destruction of the whole world vests with lord Shiva and Parvati and this centre is associated with the element of air. The soul traveller then enters into the throat centre or the Kanth Chakra. The ruling deity of this Chakra is called Adi Bhawani the mother of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Here, is a lotus with two petals. A sound is heard from this throat centre. While the person is still alive and the Eka Mai or Adi Bhiwani do not interfere with it.

### Box 25.3 The 'Tisra Til'

However, the 'Tisra Til' behind the eyes is where the Radhasoami journey begins inwardly speaking. The idea behind this is that sitting in the fifth stage it is better to go on to the tenth stage rather than start from the first stage itself. Thus Radhasoami begin their ascent in meditation from the point where the ordinary mortal ends his journey. In this brief exposition of some of the mythology and philosophy of Radhasoami faith we would not have failed to notice that there is a great deal of logic and consistency in the approach. There is every awareness and understanding of traditional yoga as well as their relatively recent Sant Mat disclosures.

Till now we have been presenting the viewpoint of Radhasoami Satsang of Beas. This is not an objectionable procedure because it is the largest Branch of the various Radhasoami sects. Further, the differences between the sects is not very much and it has so far served us well. However, it would be more representative if we were to present the viewpoint of another Radhasoami sect as this would give us a better understanding of the Radhasoamis. It would also help us understand that there are several Masters among the Radhasoami sect as a whole but their followers are not the same numbers and that a choice exists for a would be devotee to choose which sect he or she would like to affiliate with. This would depend on several factors because the smaller branches numerically have the advantage that their guru is more available to them whereas in the larger sects numerically we find that the Master may be less available to devotees due to organizational duties which often call for extensive travelling. This means that the darshan or fact to face presence of the master is not available for long periods and available for only some parts of the year, say, on important festivals. Thus the Dera itself, the base of the sect may

not have the Master with them all through the year. This is because the Master at Beas for example travels throughout the world on his mission to spread the faith.

## 25.6 Other Radhasoami Sects

So, let us see how the Radhasoami faith is described by Dera Baba Bagga Singh sect of the Radhasoami Faith. While at Beas the Master is Gurinder Singh ji Maharaj in Dera Baba Bagga Singh the living master is Baba Kehar Singh ji. Again the lineage that is accepted of the Radhasoami Gurus is not the same as in the other branches each of which have their own lineage or family tree so far as gurus and their succession is concerned.

The Bagga Singh sect of the Radhasoami begins its exposition on spirituality by pointing out rightly that man in this world is in search for happiness in various different ways. Some people try to find happiness in material pursuits and others in spirituality. For some the route to spirituality is in self abnegation, asceticism, and self control which for others is in the pursuit of pleasure. However, the goal of these various different paths is happiness itself.

It is pointed out that not knowing the source of happiness or ignorance is the biggest problem which confuses people and make them come back to sphere one even after years of effort on whatever chosen path, whether it is the worship of idols, travelling long distances on pilgrimage or to try the retreat into a forest on a cave.

### Sadguru and Naam

This lack of success says Kehar Singh ji of Dera Baba Bagga Singh is because we are seeking in the wrong place. The would be follower is trying to find realization in the outside world whereas the Supreme self or God, or the Radhasoami is in the mind body and intellect of man and not in the social world at large. It is imperative then that we look within ourselves to find God, or Radhasoami so that we can begin to approximate this vibration and holiness and the further we travel within the happier and more peaceful we will be. In other words, there has to be a coming together of the devotee and the deity if there is to be true realization.

It is next pointed out that this union with Radhasoami cannot be learnt by one in a method of trial and error but must be learnt form someone who has mastered the art and science of soul—in short a Sadguru or perfected Master. Only under the guidance of such a true Guru can the quest for realization really bear fruit. It is the Sadguru who gives the "Naam" and it is the power of the Sadguru on which the novice disciple leans upon heavily until he or she is strong enough to be more steady. However, the dependence on the guru in fact has to be strong enough to be called surrender at the feet of the guru to be successful. There are three aspects of realization of happiness and to realize oneness with Radhasoami Dham. These are the

- 1) Sadguru
- 2) Shabd
- 3) Radhasoami

These three forms are interrelated and we find that it is Sadguru who is the key catalyst to making a devotee or followers commence the journey. However, a person will not seek out a living master unless he or she is herself quite miserable and has tried several paths unsuccessfully. It is only when an individual is buffeted about by the misery and travails of the world that a desire arises within a person to find a way out of all the pain

and the sorrow. It is then alone that he goes to the Sadguru and prostrates at his feet and finds solace. The Sadguru and some of his chosen disciples then explain to the novice the true meaning of Sant Mat and how the spiritual practices prescribed are a journey to Radahsoami Dham the ultimate or God. When the disciple is ready and has understood he is initiated by the Sadguru or anyone who he has authorized to initiate into the spiritual practices fo Radhasoami faith the main of which in Bagga Singh Radhasoamis is the Shabdguru or the Word-God.

### Aspects of the Sadguru

It is the belief in the Radhasoami Math that the Master is the physical embodiment of Radhasoami Dayal the final and total vibration in the Universe. The Sadguru is the physical representative and replica of the Shabd-Brahm which is Radhasoami. As such the guru is also known as the Perfect Master. It must be made clear at this point that Sadguru or Perfect Master does not necessarily refer to some physical trait or the shape and size of the body of the Sadguru. This is a reflection on the perfection of spirituality found the person of the Sadguru.

Perfection of spiritual union with Radhasoami is what makes a master. Thus Shiv Dayal Singh ji or Soami ji as he was called lived only 60 years yet he was destined to be the common founder guru of all the Radhasoami sects and it was only after his death in 1878 that different disciples set up their own branches and began announcing their own gurus over time. As we know the most successful of the disciples of Soami ji Maharaj was Jaimal Singh who set up Dera Baba Jaimal Singh near the river Beas. Thus for his entire career as Radhasoami Master Soami jis authority was unquestioned. However, the confusion arose partly because he had not named a successor before his death.

It is said in Sant Mat that the Master himself comes to the individual who is keen to distance himself or herself from the travails of the world. There is a saying that if man does not go to Mahammed, then Mahammed will come to man. This in general defines the situation so far as the guru shishya relationship is concerned. This is a tie which leads ultimately to union with Radhasoami Dayal the ultimate vibrational deity whose emanations of power light and sound are all over the universe. The Sadguru then does not promise immediate release form all worldly bondage and unhappiness. Rather the Karma of the devotee has reached a stage of refinement and of purity that he encounters someone or something that leads him to the Master who will explain the Sant Mat and initiate him into the spiritual practices. The pursuit of this meditation regularly and substantially leads to spiritual evolution. It must be pointed out here that unhappiness cannot be converted into happiness overnight and that spiritual elevation is a long process. To hope then for union with the Radhasoami Dayal in a few weeks, months or years is then a futile hope for most devotees. For most devotees, and according to the doctrine of Karma it takes several lifetimes to reach Radhasoami Dayal. The emphasis on Sadguru as the vehicle of spiritual release is very great indeed. In fact it is a pint that cannot be overemphasized. Without Sadguru there is no Sant Mat, and without sadguru there is no liberation.

This point is stressed time and again in the discourses and the writings of all Radhasoami faith sects. However, is not enough to have found and initiated by a master there must be unflinching faith that he is the replica in human form of the ultimate reality which is Radhasoami Dayal. Thus faith in the master is a key concept in Sant Mat discourses and writings. It is this faith in the veracity and reality of the Master being the true representative of Radhasoami Dayal that is really very important for without

this there can be hardly any progress in meditation and other spiritual practices. This is only when faith awakens in a disciple that he is able to hook or latch onto the spiritual current or flow of the master and is then lifted upwards from region to region (spiritual) until he reaches the final destination Radhasoami Dayal. Thus without a real and true faith in the master no real spiritual progress is possible. This is being posited because there are some misguided devotees who think that being initiated means automatic liberation. This is not so.

#### Box 25.4 " All Things Must Change"

Sant Mat tells us that this world and all worlds are destined to perish at some point in time. Everything keeps on changing and the Buddha himself pointed out that "All things must change" is an eternal truth, and in this situation the only solution is surrender to the Sadguru. This concept of surrender is another very important one along with that of faith. Only if there is faith can there be the possibility of surrender to the feet of Sadguru. The benefit of surrender to the Sadguru is beneficial only if it is not just a matter of verbalizing it. The devotee has to feel from within that the one thing that matters is to be one with the guru because to be one with the guru is to be one with the Radhasoami Dayal. True surrender is accompanied by love and devotion or bhakti. As a matter of fact Sant Mat is of bhakti and of sufi orientation and Soami ji of Agra was very fond of quoting Persian couplets to explain the concepts and knowledge of Sant Mat. He also composed poetry in Persian. He looked also like a sufi saint with his long beard, aquiline face, prominent straight nose, and piercing eyes. Thus, Sant Mat has elements of both the bhakti and sufi orientations.

Sant Mat holds that the only permanent fact in the Universe is the Word or Naam. All the rest is of a short duration and temporary. Only Sadguru and the Naam are the true help of the suffering souls and it is through the Grace of the guru that re-birth can be circumvented otherwise it is a case of endless transmigrations, moving from death to death without end. In a world of instability the only stability is in the feet of the Sadguru. There is a story that is told by the Bagga Singh Radhasoamis regarding the situation that we have been talking about. A child goes holding the hand of his father to a fair. He enjoys looking at the various displays and the games that are going on and enjoys himself. In the midst of his celebration he gets separated from his father due to the milling crowds. He loses his grip on his father's hand and is pushed away. The child begins to weep and shout for his father "Father, father, I want my father". It is at that point that the child understands that the happiness he experienced in the fair was due to the firm clasp of his father (Sadguru) and not just the fun and frolic of the fair. Only the firm clasp of Sadguru's word can give happiness nothing else.

### 25.7 Further Teachings of Radhasoami Sect

Before we go on to explore more teachings of the Radhasoamis we need to point out a few home truths. This is rather significant at this point because from what we have been discussing it would appear that the devotees have to leave the world and go into seclusion away from the eyes of the world and away from all responsibility of family life. This is simply not a requirement for all the devotees. Most of the devotees live a responsible life and must be monogamous or celibate. Further the disciples must earn their own livelihood and not live in a state of dependence. For reasons similar to that of regulated sexuality the Radhasoami faith is strictly vegetarian and no narcotics are allowed to any disciple. However,

we many indicate that Satsang or company of fellow disciples and also listening to the discourses of the Sadguru are very important for meditation to be successful. That is disciples lives worships and works around the guidance of the Sadguru himself.

Radhasoami Satsang Beas has explained the yoga that raises the currents of spirituality beyond Trikuti centre onto the Radhasoami centre as being accessible through the Surat-shabd yoga. This yoga is the yoga of the spirit current of the yogi linking up in meditation with the unstruck sound (Anhad Naad) of the eternal thereby attaining it beneficially. For the novice or the junior initiate this would be a difficult exercise but with yoga practice this would become easier and the ability to focus on the internal manifestation of the soundless sound of eternity or Radhasoami could be contacted beneficially.

### **Surat Shabd Yoga**

The Surat shabd yoga of Sant Mat has as its goal the ability of the individual consciousness or the atman to contact the higher spiritual realms by means of the life-sound. The Radhasoami's point out that this life current is known by various nomenclatures in the scriptures including shabd, logos, naam, bani or audible life stream. The soul has to unite with the naam and hence the name of this yoga is Surat Shabd yoga. Surat means soul and shabd means holy word or naam. When due to yogic practice the two unite we have the practice of Surat Shabd yoga.

#### **Action and Reflection 25.2**

Contact and ask some members of the Radhasoami's to tell you the meaning of Surat-Shabd yoga. Note down your findings in your notebook.

Thus Surat Shabd yoga means that the soul of the individual is being united with the Divine soul through concentration on the divine sound. Now those individuals who could master this yoga and were capable of travelling in this current to the highest of spheres, indeed to Radhasoami Dham were given the title of Puran Sant, Sadguru Perfect Master and so on. Such terms describe individuals who have freed the soul from its gross entrapping and are in fact free beings. They imply that the person is a spiritual adept in dhyan and is there by able to guide individuals souls through the various existential planes of awareness and consciousness to the highest realm also known as the nameless abode or "Anaami Lok", which is the source of all possible type of existence sensate or insensate. It is the ultimate destination for the spirit of man and Surat Shabd yoga is the method and practice to get to this goal which is a spiritual one. Thus in Radhasoami Math Shabd is the power that sustains the Universe and is responsible for the creations and installation of all spiritual powers.

The Shabd is also called the unstruck Music of the spheres because at each stage of spiritual ascension we find that there is a different type of sound and music. We have mentioned this in the earlier section that at each sphere or ganglion there is a different sound which is spirituality strengthening and uplifting.

It may be noted however, that the sound stream to be usefully and beneficially contacted has to be done through the means of a realized master. It is the power or shakti which the master passes on to the disciple which allows the initiate to focus for any reasonable time on the sound current. It is also the power of the master which helps the disciple progress spiritually and to avoid distressing hallucinations and depressing thoughts or exciting thoughts which distract from meditation. The method is there but it is ineffectual unless the master directs the disciple in the

inner spheres and protects him from the negative forces or thoughts which interfere with Surat Shabd yoga. Thus Surat Shabd yoga is a journey back to the source of creation with the help of an adept who has already diffused his soul into it and become a worthy and venerable master. The lesson repeats itself: nothing is possible without grace of a realized master. This because the Master puts us in touch with life-current which moves and flows within the body audible from birth to the end of the body.

Thus, Surat Shabd yoga is a meditational method which is followed by Sant Mat and several related traditions. In Sanskrit 'Surat' means soul and Shabd means 'Word'. Thus, Surat Shabd yoga means the attempt to yoke the spirit with the word and then to rise into the eddies of the sound current. The aim then is to realise oneself in practice. Radhasoami do not tell us very specifically the length and duration of the journey to the sacred centre of the Universe but it is clear that very few individuals would be able to master the ascension into the ultimate sphere in a short while. Thus there is no specific time limit to this ascent. Naturally, this will depend upon how much effort is made by each of the novices and how serious is the involvement in the Surat Shabd yoga. It is clear with Sant Mat's belief in Karma and rebirth that Surat Shabd yoga will improve the Karmas of the individuals and enable them to move toward a final spiritual victory over time. Time is thus an essential factor in the realization of oneness with the ultimate father.

### Initiation by Living Master

Thus, initiation by a living master is the key to begin the spiritual journey in each life. This involves the regeneration of the naam and the living master enters into the Tisra til ganglion of the disciple. Along with sound current meditation is involved other spiritual exercises which include as we have mentioned in passing the sumiran or repetition of the holy words or mantra that is given at initiation to the disciple. It also involves dhyan which could be meditation or viewing of the inner master and bhajan or the listening to the inner sounds.

Radhasoami cosmology states that man or the initiate is an perfect replica of creation (macrocosm). As a result the microcosm comprises several bodies, each one which is made in such a way that it corresponds with some specific plane in the macrocosm. The initiates bodies develop over the cycles of time going from higher planes to those that are below; and conversely from those that are below to those that are above. These are the processes of involution and evolution respectively. These processes involve the revolution of Karma and transmigration to different states of consciousness Surat Shabd yoga then means that the initiate travels the microcosm and brings it into time with macrocosm with the help and guidance of a living Sadguru. Thus, the spiritual process goes on until there is perfect God-realization or the soul reaches Radhasoami Dham as the ultimate destination of the soul of man.

## 25.8 Ruhani Satsang

Surat Shabd yoga has had many teachers and many followers. However, in the case of those of the movements whose Sadgurus are no longer alive or did not name any successor and have only regents cannot be termed to be Surat Shabd yoga movements, either by themselves nor by those living Masters who teach this yoga. As such Sant Mat movements and Surat Shabd yoga require the presence of a living master. Let us now turn to a few related movements which have been influenced by Radhasoami Satsang the first of which is Ruhani Satsang. Sant Kirpal Singh the first guru of Ruhani Satsang notes that 'Naam' has been ubiquitous in religions

literature. According, to Ruhani Satsang 'Naam' is to be seen the same as

Radhasoami Satsang

Akhand Kirtan by Guru Granth Sahib

Music of the spheres by Pythagoras

- 1) Akash Bani/Sruti in the Vedas
- 2) Nada in the Upanishads
- 3) Logos/ word in New Testament
- 4) Tao in the philosophy of Lao Tze
- 5) Sraosha by Zoroaster

There are similarities between Surat Shabd yoga with the Quan Yin Method which is promoted by the Master Ching Hai. Again, there is the Master Path which is also similar to Surat Shabd yoga whose founder and the living master is Gary Olsen. According, to him several historical figures have featured in the Sant Mat movement. These include in their times according to him;

- a) Lao Tzu, b) Jesus, c) Pythagoras, d) Socrates, e) Kabir, f) The Sufi Masters Hafez and Rumi, g) The Ten Sikh Gurus, h) Tulsi Sahib, i) Radhasoami Masters, j) Offshoots of Radhasoami Masters like Sant Kirpal Singh. Thus, there have been living masters down the ages.

Ruhani Satsang is an offshoot of Radhasoami Satsang and Sant Kirpal Singh was its founder. He died in 1974 leaving his son Darshan Singh as the successor. The teachings of Radhasoami Math and Ruhani Satsang are similar. However, Ruhani Satsang requires that the initiates keep a record of the spiritual practices and experiences. On the other hand, Ruhani Satsang does not advocate the contemplation of the master during meditation like the Radhasoami Satsang which does not teach the keeping of a spiritual diary. For Kirpal Singh Ruhani Satsang is not an intellectual or philosophical system nor a system of ethics. It is rather a method by which the atman imprisoned in the body can be released so that it can join the oversoul. As in Radhasoami Math the Ruhani Satsang also advocates that the individual soul connects with the audible life stream or "Sound Current". This can only be done by an adept or master. As among the Radhasoamis vegetarianism and a simple moral life are advocated. Two hours minimum must be devoted to spiritual practice and a diary kept of all the spiritual progress and attainments as well as all pitfalls. In the movement of Kirpal Singh as is the case with Sant Mat and the Radhasoami movements we find that three factors are of the greatest importance:

- 1) Satguru
- 2) Shabd
- 3) Satsang

All three of these have been explained earlier and we need not go into it again.

Another similar movement to Radhasoami Satsang and Ruhani Satsang is Eckankar and this movement was greatly influenced by a book called "The Path of the Masters" by Juhian P. Johnson which was published in 1939. Johnson was an American who became a follower of Sawan Singh. Johnson was initiated in 1931 and joined Sawan Singh ji at Beas in 1932. Over 1933- 39 Johnson put down many of his experiences with the master in book form. Initially he helped Sawan Singh translate some of his own work into English. He then wrote four further books on the wisdom of Sant Mat. His 1939 book "The Path of the Masters" outlined in detail the

"Santon-Ki-Shiksha" or teachings of the saints. This book was a beacon call to would be devotees and had remained the authoritative text for the same even up to 1955 both to Radhasoami (Beas) and Ruhani Satsang.

## 25.9 Conclusion

The Sant Mat is not a new approach to spirituality but rather it has come out into the open and available to any sincere adherent who wishes to meditate on reality. The world has indeed become a more accessible place over the centuries and this explains why more people today are aware of Sant Mat than ever before. However, it may be pointed out that a rendition of Sant Mat and Radhasoami Math which is part of this tradition, is not very easy because it is an experiential phenomenon that we are dealing with. It makes intellectual sense to read about the Sociology of the Satsang and to understand its philosophy but to really know what it is all about the aspirant would have to get initiated and to actually practice Surat Shabd yoga, dhyan, and bhajan under the guidance of a living master.

## 25.10 Further Reading

Johnson, Julian P. 1939 The Path of the Masters. Beas, Radhasoami Satsang.

## References

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