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SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

B.S.O.C.-106

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

B.S.O.C.-106

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any **five** questions. All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Is traditional knowledge akin to science? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 45, 'Is Traditional Knowledge Akin to Science' and Page No. 44, 'The Domain of the Profane', 'Gardening among the Trobriand Islanders' and Page No. 45, 'Canoe-building among the Trobriand Islands'.

Q. 2. How is religion a group phenomena? Describe.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 2, 'Religion is a Group Phenomenon'.

Also Add: Religion and its beliefs are strong forces in humanity that are not easy to understand based on how people practice as a group. It gives people focus in life from either a group or personal perspective. This extensively covers sacredness. Religious beliefs have been held through evolution stages to date. From the group perspective, religion is a characteristic feature in the present-day mind of people. Through it, groups accept facts without direct instructions in all respects that the mind of people can tell the difference. As a social phenomenon humans engage in religious activities through group settings. Through religion, groups of people can express their feelings in forms that include secret languages. Using the same, humans solve their problems in addition to allowing co-existence by treating each other in a humanely way. This creates group settings in which human beings live. Religion sustains, nurtures, and holds together people hence fostering unity in diversity. Various groups come together to dissect and address sacred issues. The second level of association

is the denominational level. At all levels groups subscribe to a set of beliefs and carry out particular practices as long as they feel the issues are sacred and therefore supernatural. The practices authenticate group morals, give strength to the members, and satisfy the desire in their conscious minds.

Q. 3. Explain the relationship between religious ethic and economy.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 16, 'Religion and Economic', Page No. 17, 'Interrelationship Between Religious Ethics and Economy' and 'Ethics'.

Q. 4. Write a note on the secularisation process in Europe.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 34, Q. No. 4.

Q. 5. Differentiate between sect, cult and denomination.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 87, 'Sect' and Page No. 88, 'Denomination Cult'.

Q. 6. Bring out the social significance of religious festivals with suitable examples.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 81, 'Religious Festivals'.

Q. 7. Explain the functional significance of life cycle rituals.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 66, 'Major Aspects of Ritual' Page No. 67, 'Life-Cycle Rituals in Different Communities'.

Q. 8. How is the notion of sacred different from profane? Clarify.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 6, 'Sacred Versus Profane'.

■■

QUESTION PAPER

December – 2022

(Solved)

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

B.S.O.C.-106

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any five questions. All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Explain the social conditions that led to the rise of Bhakti Movement in India.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 107, 'The Bhakti Tradition'.

Q. 2. What is a Math? Outline its main objectives.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 89, 'Math'

Also Add: The Math has three objectives. (i) Its primary objective is theistic-to define, maintain the preach the theism it upholds. For that it creates institutional means to train and appoint preachers of its theism. (ii) It strives for inculcation of ethical-moral values, the main aim being to rehabilitate the individual in family, polity and society, (iii) Organisation of charitable social work is the third objective. It includes running of dispensaries and hospitals, educational institutions and Sanskrit pathshalas (schools). In pursuance of its theistic aim, the Math often maintains a printing press to publish books and journals. It may also maintain a library for education and research.

Q. 3. Explain functionalist theories of religion.

Ans. Functionalists argue that religion is a conservative force and that this is a positive function for society and for individuals. Religion helps to create social order and maintains the value consensus. Durkheim, Parsons and Bellah argue that religion performs important functions for society, while Malinowski argues that it performs an important function for the individual. All agree that religion promotes stability and helps to preserve the *status quo* and prevent upheaval and rapid social change.

Durkheim conducted a study of the Arunta, an Australian aboriginal tribe's religious beliefs in order to establish the function of the beliefs and ceremonies and what it really signified. Durkheim deliberately chose

what he considered to be a very primitive religion in order to focus on the essential elements of belief and its functions. He argued that society divided objects and activities into the sacred and the profane. The profane were everyday experiences with a clear function, while the sacred had a greater, collective significance. In the religion Durkheim studied, various "totems" were considered sacred.

Durkheim concluded that when a society came together to worship collectively, what they were really worshipping was society itself. Durkheim recognised that society was becoming less religious and more secular, but he argued that there was still this secular function for religious belief. This was developed in the 1960s by Bellah with his work on Civil Religion. Bellah argued that in some modern secular states, people worshipped society in a clear way, still based around symbols, but without the supernatural, divine element of traditional religions. His example is Americanism, the way American society, which was religiously diverse and increasingly secular, coalesced instead around America itself, with the religious symbols being the flag, the national anthem, famous historical figures, etc. While this might not fit everyone's definition of religion, it performs the same functions that Durkheim identified and promotes social cohesion, order, stability and prevents radical change, again acting as a conservative force.

Talcott Parsons also made a case for religion performing these fundamental functions to integrate

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

BLOCK-1 : SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION



Formulating Religions: Elementary Forms of Religion

INTRODUCTION

Religion is human being's shared beliefs and practices. It can be called a human response to the elements that are beyond the ordinary understanding. This is an attempt of human beings to understand some power that is supernatural and suprasensory. The word religion originated from the Latin word "rel(i)igio", which has come from two words – leg and lig. Leg, which means to gather, count or observe, refers to belief in and practice of 'Signs of Divine Communication'. Lig, which means to bind, refers to the carrying out of those activities which link human beings with the supernatural powers. Thus, religion represents human beliefs and practices.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

SOCIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGION

Religion embodies the most sublime human aspirations and holds the normative structure of society. It upholds values, morality and ethics of society.

It establishes public order and provides people the inner peace. It civilises mankind. It also has negative effects as it promotes fanaticism and intolerance, ignorance, superstition and obscurantism. Different forms of religion are there and they can be classified into three classes:

- (a) Simple form of religion;
- (b) Complex form of religion; and
- (c) Mixed form of religion.

Key features of simple form of religion are:

- (i) It is archaic, ahistorical and timeless.
- (ii) It has existed since the beginning of the world.
- (iii) It is not founded by human being.
- (iii) Beliefs and rituals are transmitted orally from one generation to the next.

(iv) Religious experiences are anaesthetic and shared collectively as rituals and festivities.

(v) It can be described but cannot be explained.

(vi) It is practised in 'good faith'.

Such religions have no scriptures or holy books.

The tendency to philosophise also does not exist. The practical aspect of religion and magic are present.

Emile Durkheim differentiates the simple form and the complex form of religions. Simple form is like the inner ring a tree and the complex form is the outer ring.

In simple societies, he believes, there are two elements in the supernatural field – the sacred and the profane. The sacred element is religion and the profane element is magic or primitive science. Malinowski categorises religion and magic as the sacred part and science as the profane part.

Every society has its own religious myths. Myths are the carriers of beliefs from one generation to other. However, every society has its own conception of the supernatural beliefs. Some society may believe in ghosts and spirits, while some other may believe in impersonal power. For some people, the supernatural may be manifested in anthropomorphic Gods and Goddesses.

Tylor's theory of animism believes in soul (*anima*). He says there can be multiple sources of religion, but the soul is crucial. According to him, there are two phases in the evolution of simple form of religions:

- (a) Lower animism
- (b) Higher animism

Lower animism is amoral. It implies that the soul continues even after death and it does not depend on the death. Higher animism is based on the "retribution doctrine". It believes in rewards and punishments for the soul, which depends on the lifetime performance.

Critics believe animism is a later development. Preuss and Max Mueller's theory of animatism beliefs that everything in nature has life and is animate.

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Manaism is a special form of animatism. Majumdar and Madan's theory is based on the notion that the primitive religion is based on belief in an all-pervading supernatural power. It is 'beyond the reach of the senses' and exists in all objects, including human beings, and expresses as physical force or power. Marett believes such belief is called Manaism after the Polynesian term '*mana*' to represent this power.

For an example, Hos of Singhbhumi in Bihar believe in the concept of 'bonga' that resides in trees, natural objects and sometimes in manmade articles. They believe this supernatural power is the cause of all energy. Majumdar called this as Bongaism.

According to Frazer, magic, religion and science are the three phases of the same reality in a society. In primitive societies, people adopted two ways of facing the realities – magic and religion. Magic is the belief in the superior supernatural power, which coerces it into service. For example, chanting magical words make supernatural spirits to obey the magician. Religion is subservience to the supernatural forces and worshipping them. According to Frazer, magic and religion existed together as simpler forms of religions in primitive societies. Science is the last stage in the progress of knowledge and is based on the principles of cause and effect, but unlike magic it is based on correlations that can be proved.

Key features of complex form of religion are:

- (i) It is historical. Thus, its origin can be traced.
- (ii) The founder is recognised as the incarnation of God, or the son of God, or the messenger of God.
- (iii) The founder is believed to have divine powers and the followers look upon the founder as saviour.
- (iv) Beliefs and rituals are codified and textualised.
- (v) The scriptures are considered as holy and believed as the sacred words of God.
- (vi) Personal experience of religious phenomena is emphasised.
- (vii) Faith is organised around the personality of the founder.
- (viii) The adherents are required to believe and follow a body of doctrine.
- (ix) New doctrines are added during scholastic development.
- (x) Cults and sects develop because of the new interpreters from the same spiritual lineage.
- (xi) Specialists, preachers, monks and ascetics devote their lives to propagate the ideology.

Mixed form of religion includes the feature of both the simple and the complex forms. Mixed forms have scholastic explanation but without any history.

Religion is a Group Phenomenon

Religion is considered as a group phenomenon because it involves a group of people or a community. Beliefs and practices are shared and performed together. Worship, festivals and rituals are collectively done. For example, in his study of a Coorg village, M.N. Srinivas observed that the festivals of village deities include a village-dance, collective hunt and a dinner for the entire village. The entire village takes part in the dinner, called 'urome' (village-harmony). Durkheim equates God with society and it is like when worshipping God means worshipping the society. Durkheim suggests that God is a human creation and a social creation. God is born in the collective experience of coming together, resulting in rituals.

However, individual beliefs operate in the context of shared social values and norms. Some people believe religion belongs to the realm of the private life and they do not disclose their religious affiliation in public either through rituals or any religious marker. Some parents are not bothered about the religious affiliation of their sons or daughters as they feel it is their personal affair. Many people may be critical about religion. Some people reject it altogether. Yet people learn the religious values, beliefs and practices in the society they live.

The 'Supernatural' and the 'Sacred'

Every religion has the idea of the supernatural, something which is beyond understanding. It is 'omnipotent', 'infinite' or 'extraordinary'. Tylor says 'belief in supernatural beings' is the religion. Belief in the supernatural beings include belief in other kind of beings such as magic forces, angels or souls of dead ancestors. Believers arrange the supernatural beings in a hierarchy according to their power or they differentiate the supernatural beings in terms of their functions. For example, Hindus believe that Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva perform the functions of creation, maintenance and destruction of the cosmic order, respectively. Some people try to personify supernatural elements as human beings. They try to comprehend the supernatural. Some also believe that the supernatural forces can be pacified and favours can be extracted from them. Some people interpret natural misfortunes as the acts of supernatural power. Some considered natural forces like wind, fire and mountain as supernatural forces.

Some scholars differentiate the 'sacred' from the 'profane'. Sacred *versus* profane like other worldly *versus* worldly and extraordinary *versus* ordinary. The 'profane' means unholy, secular and mundane. Possible communication between the profane and the sacred happens during rituals. Durkheim says sacred and profane are different. Some scholars do not agree with this view and argue such a strict separation emerges out of a church or temple-entered understanding of religion. They say sacred impinges on many profane activities in day-to-day life.

Supernatural and Sacred

There are different types of supernatural beings such as 'sacred' forces, evil forces or neutral supernatural forces. For example, in the *Bible Satan* (devil) was powerful enough to tempt even Jesus, when he was doing penance in the desert. All categories of supernatural beings create a sense of 'fear' and 'respect' in human beings.

Beliefs and Rituals

A belief means a state or habit of mind in which a person places trust or confidence in some person or thing. A belief has the same value as statement of knowledge or truth. A belief is a part of system of knowledge or a system of understanding reality shared by members of a group. It provides the individual with explanation and meaning of life thus helping one to understand the aspects of life, like death, suffering, social injustice, etc.

Religious beliefs are a religious tenet or body of tenets. Religious tenets may include the worship of God or the supernatural. For example, Tylor defined religion as the belief in supernatural beings (animism) such as ghosts, spirits and Gods. Marett defined religion as the belief in supernatural power (animatism), such as *mana*.

Ritual is a repeated act or a set of acts, usually ceremonial in nature, by means of which a community makes external its faith. It is a kind of patterned activity oriented towards the control of human affairs. Beliefs and rituals are interrelated. Every ritual is based on beliefs. Religious beliefs are made over rituals. An important example of ritual is the funeral ritual. It provides an occasion for group assembly and reaffirms social value. According to Wallace, the primary element of religion is the use of ritual to mobilise supernatural power. Rituals commonly portray or act out important aspects of religious myths and cosmology and often express anxieties and pre-occupations which are commonly felt by members of a group adhering to a religion. Thus, beliefs and rituals are two sides of the

same coin. Distinction can be made between belief and ritual as belief is a mode of forming ideas while ritual is mode of action.

Moral Prescriptions

Morals are born out of religion. Human beings define their relationship with the 'sacred' as per their beliefs and religious tenets. Their behavioral patterns are defined and shaped accordingly. Some acts are considered as sacred. For example, the 'Ten Commandments' are an essential component of Jewish-Christian religion. They are the moral prescriptions for human beings to relate to God. Religion is the source of moral values. Religion differentiates between the right and the wrong. Society, family, education and law are also sources of moral prescriptions. Followers of in a particular religion are also expected to adhere to its moral prescriptions. These moral prescriptions are shared by all the members of the group. Religion and certain of its moral prescriptions are more relevant today than ever before. This is so because some people believe that science is increasingly becoming inhuman. Billions of dollars are being spent in arms and weapons when millions of human beings die of starvation. Thus, military-defence expenditure has been a moral issue. For example, to follow the religious principle of non-violence, prevention of the increasing militarisation of science can become a moral commitment.

INTELLECTUALIST THEORIES OF RELIGION

Intellectualist theories of religion argue that religion is a rational response of the human beings to the natural phenomena. Initially the reports of missionaries and adventures told about the nature of religion among the primitives. For example, De Brosses' theory suggested that religion' had its origin in fetishism: Portugese sailors reported that the coastal Negro tribes in West Africa worshipped animals and inanimate things. This theory was Comte's Polytheism which was superseded by the ghost theory and soul theory. The latter theories are called intellectualist theories of religion because the ghost theory and soul theory assume that the primitives are rational beings even as their explanation of natural phenomena are somewhat crude.

Another theory belonging to the nature-myth school came before these two theories.

The Nature-Myth School

The Nature-Myth School dealt with Indo-European religions. According to this school, ancient gods were personifications of natural phenomena. Max Miller, a German linguist, was the main propounder of this school.

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He believed that grand natural objects gave people a feeling of the infinite. These objects became symbols of the infinite. People thought the celestial bodies such as moon, stars, dawn and their attributes in terms of metaphor and symbol. Max suggested that with the passage of time the symbolic representations became an independent identity of their own and separated from that which they represented. The attributes or the symbols became personified as deities. Early human beings were unable to understand or explain the world of nature. They worshiped the nature out of fear and awe. He noted that the religion of early man can be studied by looking into linguistic etymological meaning of the name of Gods and legends associated with them. Max's interpretations however could not be supported by historical evidence and critics such as Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor and Andrew Lang adopted different approaches.

The Ghost Theory

Herbert Spencer and Edward Tylor studied religious behaviour of people in simple societies. In his book, *The Principles of Sociology*, Spencer wrote about primitive beliefs. He suggested that the primitives were rational though with a limited quantum of knowledge. They had reasonable, though weak, inferences on natural phenomena. The primitives got the notion of visible and invisible conditions by observing sun, moon, clouds and stars come and go. Similarly, they got the idea of layperson's duality from dreams. They considered dreams as real life-experiences. They believed the dream self moves about at night while the shadow-self acts by the day. People's experiences of temporary loss of sensibility reinforced the notion of duality. The extended the idea of duality to animals, plants and material objects. Spencer suggested that the appearance of dead persons in dreams is taken by people in simple societies as the evidence of temporary after life. This led to the conception of ghost as a supernatural being. The idea of ghosts developed as the idea gods and the ghosts of ancestors become divine beings. Spencer concluded that ancestor worship is the root of every religion. Spencer's theory appear to have some plausibility because the idea of ghosts of ancestors or other superior beings becoming divinities is commonly found among the primitives in many parts of the world. However, Spencer built the ideas of the reasoning of the primitives without going near them.

The Soul Theory or Animism

Sir Edward Tylor's theory of animism or the theory of soul explains the origin of religion in terms of the idea of soul. Tylor suggested that death, disease, visions and dreams led the primitives to think about the existence of immaterial power, i.e., the soul. The primitives believed the soul exists independent of its physical home the body and the idea of belief in spiritual beings developed. Thus, Tylor said religion originated from a belief in spiritual beings.

This idea of soul is then projected on to creatures other than human and even to inanimate objects. These spiritual beings later develop into Gods. The primitives believed the spiritual being have superior powers and control destiny of human beings. Tylor's definition is so general that all faiths and beliefs are likely to be labelled as religion. Tylor's own thought was projected on to the primitives' thought processes and there are no means of knowing if this or something else is what was actually thought by the primitives.

Swanton pointed out Tylor's theory cannot be proved. He suggested that what Tylor said an 'obvious inference' cannot be proved to be either an 'obvious' or the 'only one possible' inference.

Andrew Lang also criticised Tylor's theory. He did not accept that the idea of Gods could have developed from a belief in ghosts or spirits. In his book, *Myth, Ritual and Religion*, Lang argued that the idea of God cannot have evolved out of reflections on dreams and ghosts because the two have different origins. He suggested that the belief in a God emerged first and that belief degraded as animism. He suggested that the beliefs in monotheism and animism came to Christianity through Hebrew and Hellenistic sources. Lang's views on religion were not taken seriously, but his criticism of Tylor's theory inspired many scholars including Wilhelm Schmidt to study the subject of monotheism in simple societies.

R. R. Marett also criticised the animistic theory. He claimed that the primitive belief in an impersonal force preceded beliefs in spiritual beings. The impersonal force, called *mana*, may be considered as similar to the notion of *Bonga* (prevalent among many tribal groups in India). He argued that belief in *mana* had both historical and theoretical priority. Marett established that a belief in *mana* and *tabu* (or taboo) together provided a definition of the magico-religious thinking.